

Symptoms with Exercise

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FACT SHEET



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Limiting movement: a common mistake

If you have dizziness because of inner ear problems, migraines, brain injury, or something else, you may notice you are limiting movement of your head or body to make the dizziness better. You may have also stopped going to places that are crowded or have busy patterned floors or walls. You may be less active than usual and become off balance because you are not challenging yourself by doing your normal activities in the home, community, or outdoors. However, in order for your dizziness to get better, it is important to resume the movements or activities that you have been avoiding. A physical therapist can help you through this process with some exercises.

Exercises for dizziness

Depending on your needs, your physical therapist will likely give you gaze stabilization and/or habituation exercises. Gaze stabilization exercises will help you to see clearly while your head is moving. These exercises involve moving your head while keeping your eyes focused on a target. For the exercise to work, you must move your head as quickly as you can while looking at the target. It is normal for you to get a little dizzy or miss the target every now and then. Habituation exercises help your brain get used to and ignore movements or situations that make you feel dizzy. You only need to perform a few repetitions of these exercises to see improvement. It is very important that you rest in between exercises and allow your symptoms to go back to the level they were before starting the exercise.

Should these exercises actually make me feel dizzier?

The exercises should cause a mild to moderate increase in dizziness for only a few seconds. This slight increase in symptoms in the short-term is what actually helps the brain make permanent changes to decrease dizziness in the long-term. If you do the exercises and you feel no increase in dizziness, then you might be able to make the exercise a little harder or you may not need to perform it anymore.

You must be careful not to overdo it either. Tell your physical therapist if you become nauseated or develop a headache during the exercises, or if your symptoms do not decrease to their previous level within 15-20 minutes. He or she will change your exercises to be sure you can tolerate them better. Also, if you feel off balance after doing an exercise, sit down and take a break so that you do not fall.

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When will I see improvement?

It is important for you to do your exercises as prescribed and go to all of your therapy sessions. This will allow the physical therapist to better monitor your symptoms and progress, make changes to your exercises as needed, and communicate with your physician should other steps in your care be necessary. You should begin to notice less dizziness with your exercises and daily activities within 2-4 weeks. However, it may take longer depending on the cause and the severity of your symptoms. If you feel your dizziness is getting worse or not changing, you may need to speak to your physician and your PT for further medical management.