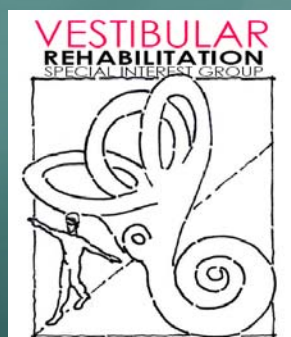


FACT SHEET



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Bilateral Vestibular Hypofunction



What is Bilateral Vestibular Loss (BVL) or Hypofunction (BVH)?

When a person loses function on both sides of the balance part of the inner ear (vestibular system) this is known as bilateral vestibular loss (BVL) or hypofunction (BVH). This condition has also been called Dandy's syndrome. There are many causes of BVH including a reaction to certain medications (ototoxicity), infections, head trauma, and aging. Many times, the cause of BVL is unknown. Gentamicin is an antibiotic that may damage the vestibular system and it is the most common cause of BVL. Symptoms of BVL may include problems with vision and poor balance that is worse in the dark, or when standing or walking on uneven surfaces. People with BVL often fall down also because of the inner ear problem. Visual symptoms are called "oscillopsia" and occur when the head is moving. Objects may appear to bounce or wobble with head motion, especially while driving. Tests that measure the amount of damage to the vestibular system include a test called electronystagmography (ENG) or videonystagmography (VNG). In some locations, a rotary chair test may be available and help to measure remaining function of your inner ears.

What can be done about my symptoms related to BVL?

Physical therapists often try several different things to help people with BVH. Physical therapists teach people how to perform certain eye/head exercises to help you use any remaining function of your inner ears. The physical therapy exercise program is usually supervised in a clinic by a physical therapist and you will be asked to complete exercises, daily, at home. The exercises may consist of eye/head movements where you keep a target in focus while moving your head in different directions or at different speeds. You will be asked to work at a level that may increase your symptoms; however, your reaction to treatment will be closely monitored.

You will also do exercises to help you use other senses that are important for balance such as the sensation from your feet. Your physical therapist will help you learn strategies to compensate for BVL such as turning on the lights at night so that you are safe walking in the dark. You may find that in busy places such as grocery stores or shopping malls you will be more comfortable using a cane for added support. Recovery from BVL occurs more slowly than when only one ear was damaged, and even when you do all of the exercise faithfully, patient response to treatment varies.



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