

What is Unilateral Vestibular Hypofunction (UVH)?

A diagnosis of unilateral vestibular hypofunction is made when the balance system in your inner ear, the peripheral vestibular system, is not working properly. There is a vestibular system in both inner ears, so unilateral means that only one side is impaired, while the other side is working normally. This can help greatly in the recovery process! Our inner ear and eyes work together through the *vestibular-ocular reflex (VOR)*, which is a very fast reflex that keeps our vision clear with head movement. This reflex can become less effective when there is a problem with the inner ear. Through a process called VOR adaptation, we can make changes to the way our ears and eyes work together and compensate for this problem.

How can physical therapy help me?

A physical therapist (PT) will do an examination, including tests of your vestibular and visual systems, balance, walking, and activities at home or work that you are having trouble with. Using this information, the PT will provide an individualized exercise program, including exercises to increase VOR adaptation and improve your dizziness.

How does VOR Adaptation work?

Your PT will provide you with “gaze stabilization” exercises to help the inner ear regain its function (a form of VOR adaptation). By moving your head quickly while keeping your vision focused on a target, the brain is able to *adapt* or reset the way the eyes move with the head. This will help improve your ability to move your head without blurred vision and decrease your dizziness.

What else do I need to know about VOR Adaptation?

It is important to note that at first the exercise ***may temporarily increase your symptoms of dizziness***, but this is normal and a necessary part of the recovery process. Based on the research, your PT will prescribe the right amount of exercises to do each day. If this is a new problem, the goal is to perform at least 12 minutes of gaze stabilization exercises total throughout the day, or if you have been experiencing this for a while, then the goal is 20 minutes total throughout the day. Your PT will instruct you so that it is enough to make improvements, but also manageable for you in your daily life. Stick with it and ask your therapist if you have any questions. Having some symptoms helps us know that we are heading in the right direction with your recovery process!

Adapted from the Academy of Neurologic Physical Therapy Education Handouts “What is Bilateral Vestibular Loss (BVL) or Hypofunction (BVH)?” Your Physical Therapist will also provide education about how to manage your symptoms at home and work to improve your ability to perform daily activities.