

Introduction

When you are dizzy, you may feel lightheaded or lose your balance. If you also feel that the room is spinning, you may have vertigo. Vertigo is a type of severe dizziness.

There are many causes of dizziness. Dizziness often gets better by itself or it is easily treated. However, it may be a symptom of other disorders. Frequent or severe dizziness can interrupt your life. Learning about dizziness and its causes can help you learn how to prevent or lessen symptoms.

This reference summary explains the symptoms, causes, diagnosis and treatment of dizziness and vertigo.

Symptoms

Dizziness is a term that means you feel faint or lightheaded. It could also mean that you feel weak or unsteady. Dizziness is one of the most common reasons why adults see their health care providers.

Dizziness that happens all the time can stop you from enjoying daily activities. However, it rarely means that you have a severe or deadly problem.

There are several ways to describe how you feel when you are dizzy. You may experience:

- Feeling lightheaded or about to faint.
- Feeling like you are floating or swimming.
- Loss of balance.

Vertigo is a type of severe dizziness. It can make you feel like the room is spinning or whirling. Vertigo happens quickly. It may last a few minutes, hours or days. Vertigo can cause nausea and vomiting.

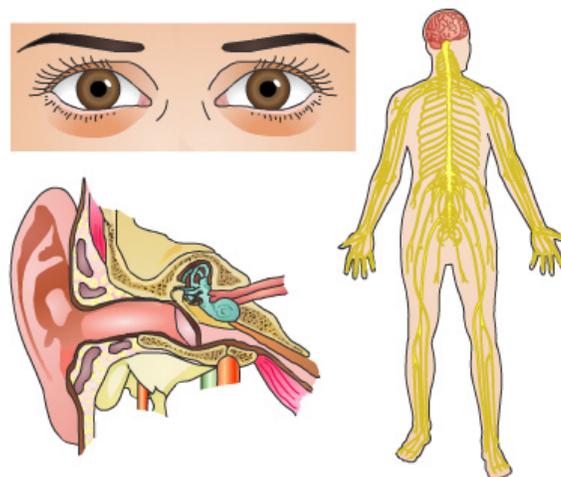


This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Some health conditions can also cause these symptoms by sending confusing signals to your brain. The signals are sent from one or more of your sensory systems.

The sensory systems include:

- The eyes. Your eyes let your brain see if you are moving.
- The sensory nerves. These send signals to your brain about body movement and position.
- The inner ear. It holds sensors that help you keep your balance and sense of motion.



Complications

Talk to your health care provider if you have dizziness and you do not know why. Dizziness can cause you to fall or hurt yourself. If you become dizzy while driving, it could result in a car accident.

A health condition may be the cause of your dizziness. If left untreated, it could cause long term problems.

You need to quickly seek medical care if you have severe dizziness and:

- Changes in vision.
- Chest pain.
- Inability to speak or hear.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Vomiting that does not stop.
- Symptoms of a stroke.

Stroke symptoms include numbness, tingling, weakness or loss of movement. Symptoms may happen in your face, arm or leg.



Causes

Dizziness has many causes. The way dizziness makes you feel or how long it lasts can provide clues to the cause. Triggers that cause your symptoms are clues as well. A trigger could be a certain activity or position.

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Dizziness may make you feel faint and lightheaded. Nausea, pale skin and clamminess can also happen. Dizziness can be caused by:

- A drop in blood pressure.
- Not enough blood output from the heart.
- Dehydration.

Certain drugs may cause dizziness. Motion sickness can also cause it.

Vertigo is often caused by a sudden or temporary change in your inner ear. The inner ear senses movement and changes in your head position. Moving around or sitting up during a vertigo episode can make your symptoms worse.

The most common cause of vertigo is benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, or BPPV. BPPV causes short but severe episodes of vertigo. It happens after a change in the position of your head.

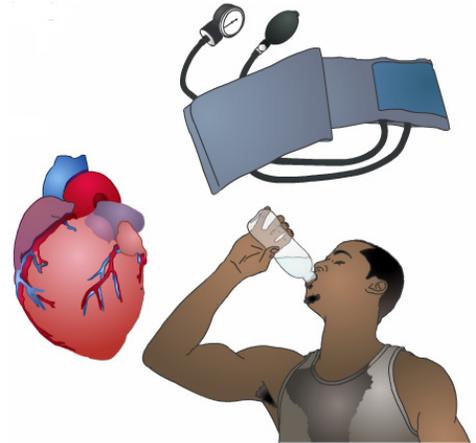
Vertigo could be caused by swelling in the inner ear. Dizziness that starts suddenly and happens all the time is the main symptom. It could last for a few days. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting and trouble with balance. These symptoms may be so severe that you have to stay in bed.

If sudden hearing loss is also a symptom along with vertigo, this condition is called labyrinthitis or neuronitis. Though labyrinthitis will often get better on its own, early treatment can help you feel better faster.

Meniere's disease is a condition that can cause vertigo. It happens due to the buildup of fluid in the inner ear. Meniere's disease causes sudden vertigo that can last for hours. It also causes hearing loss, tinnitus and ear pressure. Tinnitus is a disorder in which a person hears a ringing or roaring in their ears.

A migraine headache can cause vertigo or dizziness that lasts for hours or days. It may also make you sensitive to light or noise.

Vertigo could be caused by an acoustic neuroma, a benign growth on the vestibular nerve. This nerve connects the inner ear to your brain. Other symptoms include hearing loss and tinnitus in one ear. Benign means "not cancerous."



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

There are other causes of vertigo. Rarely, it can be a symptom of a more serious problem. It may be caused by a stroke, brain hemorrhage or multiple sclerosis. Other symptoms often happen in these cases. They may include double vision, slurred speech, weakness of the face or numbness.

Other "dizzy" feelings may be harder to describe. You may feel "spaced out" or have the sensation of spinning inside your head. Your health care provider may refer to this as nonspecific dizziness.

Some causes of nonspecific dizziness include:

- Medications.
- Inner ear disorders.
- Anxiety disorders.
- Low iron levels, also known as anemia.
- Low blood sugar, also known as hypoglycemia.
- Ear infections.
- Overheating and dehydration.
- Sensory disorders like poor vision and nerve damage in limbs.



Dizziness that continues to happen over a long period of time is known as chronic dizziness. If the dizziness does not have a known cause, a person who has it may be too sensitive to his or her own motion.

Chronic dizziness is made worse by:

- Complex visual environments, such as the grocery store.
- Visual motion, such as a movie.
- Patterns, such as a tiled floor containing color or shape patterns.
- Intense visual tasks, such as painting.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Diagnosis

To diagnose the disease, your health care provider will do a physical exam. He or she will ask you questions about your health history. You may be asked to tip your head back or lie on a certain side to see if that causes your dizziness or vertigo.

Be ready to describe your dizziness.

- When you feel dizzy, do you feel like the room is spinning or like you are spinning in the room?
- Do you feel like you might pass out?

Your description is crucial to helping your health care provider make a diagnosis.

Other tests that help diagnose dizziness and vertigo include:

- Eye movement testing.
- Posturography testing.
- Rotary-chair testing. During this test, you sit in a computer-controlled chair that moves very slowly in a full circle. At faster speeds, it moves back and forth.



This test tells your health care provider which parts of the balance system you rely on the most. It also tells them which parts may be giving you problems. You will stand in your bare feet on a platform and try to keep your balance.

Treatment

The treatment you receive depends on the cause and symptoms of your dizziness. Medicines may be able to reduce the spinning feeling caused by vertigo. They can also reduce nausea and vomiting.

Canalith repositioning is used to treat BPPV. It is often effective after one or two treatments. Your health care provider will move your head in different positions.

Prescription medications can help prevent the nausea and dizziness caused by inner ear conditions. Exercises taught by a physical therapist may be used to treat vestibular neuronitis or labyrinthitis. These exercises can help you learn to keep better balance. Medicines may be able to reduce vertigo caused by Meniere's disease. They can also reduce the nausea and vomiting. Some people can prevent symptoms by eating a diet that is low in salt and sugar.

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

To prevent vertigo caused by a vestibular migraine, avoid the triggers for your attacks. Medicines may help prevent attacks. They can also provide relief from nausea and vomiting. You may learn exercises to help your balance system become less sensitive to motion.

Even if no cause is found, medicines and other treatments can help you control your symptoms. You may be able to reduce the symptoms during an attack if you lie down and hold your head still.

Take your time when you change your position if standing up makes you feel lightheaded. Avoid sudden movements and stand up slowly. Drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration can cause you to feel lightheaded or make it worse.

If you have felt dizzy while driving, seek help. Ask friends, family or colleagues to help you get to and from work and other activities. Public transportation is another option you may consider. If your dizziness causes you to feel like you might fall, take steps to reduce your risk of falling. Keep your home well lit and free of anything that might cause you to trip.

Place furniture where you are not likely to bump into it and use nonslip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors. When you start to feel dizzy, sit or lie down. If needed, walk with a cane. Avoid using caffeine, alcohol and tobacco. Using these substances can make your symptoms worse.

Summary

When you are dizzy, you may feel lightheaded or lose your balance. If you feel that the room is spinning, you may have vertigo. There are many causes of dizziness. Dizziness often gets better by itself or it is easily treated. However, it may be a symptom of other disorders. Frequent or severe dizziness can interrupt your life.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

There are risk factors that may increase your chance of dizziness. They include:

- Age.
- Taking certain medicines.
- A history of dizziness.

The treatment you receive depends on the cause and symptoms of your dizziness. Medicines may be able to reduce the spinning feeling caused by vertigo. They can also reduce nausea and vomiting.

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.