



Ask the Expert

Arizona Republic

Q: Several times throughout the day, I suddenly become dizzy. I've been told I may have a balance disorder. What is this and are there any treatment options available?

A: Your first thought may be to visit the emergency room, where you will most likely be treated with an anti-dizziness medication. Essentially, this drug is an antihistamine similar to Dramamine, which is used to treat motion sickness. Although it may decrease your symptoms, it is only a temporary solution.

Based on your symptoms, your physician may refer you to an ear, nose and throat specialist who will perform a variety of tests to determine the cause of your dizziness. These tests will determine if your dizziness originates within your inner ear or the peripheral nervous system, and if so, the specialist may arrange for you to see a physical therapist with a specialty in vestibular rehabilitation therapy.

Conditions such as vertigo and Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) are directly linked to a dysfunction of the inner ear. Vertigo is a general term for an unbalanced feeling, such as the one you describe. However, the true definition of dizziness refers to a spinning sensation, which is usually diagnosed as BPPV.

BPPV is caused by the collection of calcium crystals in the posterior canal of the semicircular canals of the inner ear, which sends mixed signals to the brain. Your vision tells your brain that your head is in a certain position, but the semicircular canals send conflicting messages as if your head is tilted upward. Your brain does not know which signal is correct, and as a result, you feel a spinning sensation or dizziness. This type of vertigo is easily treatable with a technique called the Epley's Maneuver or Canalith Repositioning Maneuver. Your physical therapist manually moves the crystals out of the posterior canal using a series of head movements, thus returning the crystals back into the normal flow of the semicircular canals, alleviating the mixed signals and dizziness. This may take between one to four treatments to accomplish.

Vertigo is more difficult to treat because it is a general term for a dysfunction of the inner ear. There are a host of problems that can occur in the inner ear from an inner ear infection to long-term damage from working in loud environments. When the balance system is damaged, the brain must retrain itself to compensate for the mixed signals sent from the damaged ear. This compensation process occurs naturally in most people, but some may require vestibular rehabilitation therapy in order to fully recover.



Catholic Healthcare West



The Outpatient Rehabilitation Department at Chandler Regional Medical Center is one of the few facilities in the East Valley that offers vestibular rehabilitation therapy. For more information, please call 480.728.3864, or e-mail Jennifer.Ousley-Trevett@chw.edu.