How Can Vestibular Therapy Help with My Vertigo?

The onset can be sudden. You wake up one morning and feel yourself or the room spinning as you try to turn or sit up in bed. You might feel lightheaded and unexpectedly lose your balance when walking in the early evening darkness with your dog. Riding in the car, bending over to weed your garden, or looking at the tile floor in a bathroom may leave you dizzy and nauseous. You may even have double vision, headaches, or difficulty concentrating, perhaps hours after you used your head to hit a soccer ball toward your teammate.

These are symptoms that patients with vestibular problems describe when they come to Penn Therapy & Fitness for balance/vestibular therapy, sometimes weeks or even years after the onset. The vestibular system includes small positional sensing organs in your inner ears. These work together with your vision and joint position sensors to establish good balance. An estimated 35% of adults aged 40 years or older in the United States have experienced some form of vestibular dysfunction. Unfortunately, dizziness can lead to injury, and balance-related falls account for more than one-half of the accidental deaths in the elderly.

It is important that patients with vertigo get a proper diagnosis by a qualified healthcare professional such as a primary care doctor, an ENT (ear nose and throat specialist), or neurologist. A wide range of treatments are available but not all are appropriate for every diagnosis.

Some of the more common vestibular diagnoses include:

- **Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo** - This is the most common cause of vertigo. It occurs when tiny crystals that we all have inside our inner ear balance system move out of place resulting in a false sense of movement when you turn, look up or down, or bend over.

- **Vestibular neuritis/labyrinthitis** - This is an inflammation of inner ear balance structures, usually due to an everyday cold, flu, or other infection. Dizziness or a feeling of being off balance can last long after the inflammation
has resolved.

- **Vestibular migraine** - This is dizziness associated with changes in blood flow to the brain sometimes triggered by stress, hormones, lack of sleep, or changes in weather. With vestibular migraine, the patient may or may not have headaches with some of the episodes of vertigo.

- **Meniere’s disease** - This is a recurrent and periodic increase in fluid and pressure in the inner ear that causes damage to the inner ear balance and hearing structures and is usually associated with a gradual loss of hearing and/or ringing in the ears (tinnitus).

- **Concussion** - This is a traumatic event which may occur during a car accident, with sports play, and even when hitting your head very hard on a low doorway or cement after a fall. In this case, the central brain structures which process vestibular information may be damaged, resulting in dizziness and other symptoms.

**Vestibular therapy uses a variety of treatments to reduce or even eliminate dizziness and vertigo including:**

- Repositioning maneuvers to restore inner ear crystals to their place
- Specific eye and head movements to improve the brain’s ability to use vestibular information effectively
- Balance training to increase the body’s ability to react safely to movement

Our [Penn Therapy & Fitness vestibular rehabilitation team](#) has received considerable training—including training and successful completion of the Competency-Based Vestibular Rehabilitation course directed by [Susan Herdman, PT, PhD, FAPTA at Emory University](#). When Penn Therapy & Fitness vestibular therapists see patients, we offer strategies to manage their symptoms so they can return to the activities they love. Your physical therapist will design an individualized set of exercises and activities that address your unique needs, specifically targeting problems related to dizziness, vertigo or postural imbalance.
Take the first step in managing your vertigo by talking with your doctor about adding physical therapy as part of your treatment plan. To learn more about our Penn Therapy & Fitness outpatient services, [click here.](#)