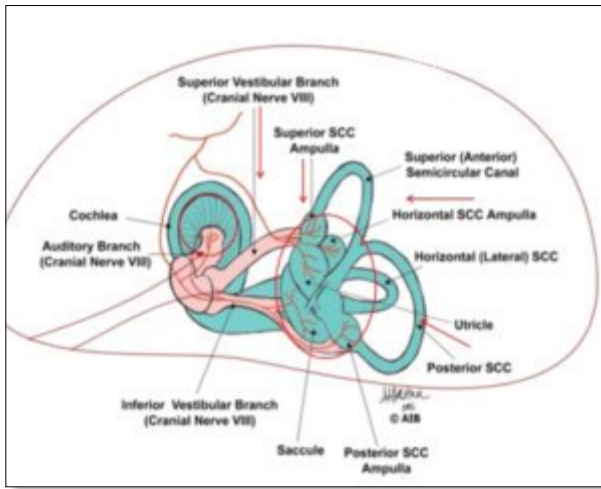


PLAYING THROUGH

Healthy Life. Better Game.

VERTIGO

The vestibular system is housed in the inner ear and is responsible for maintaining our equilibrium or balance as we move through life. When the vestibular system sustains an injury or stops functioning correctly, it can cause vertigo, blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, and a variety of other complaints. While the vestibular system is not the only thing that can cause



dizziness, it is one of the leading causes.

Everyday 10,000 people worldwide turn 65. One of the most prominent complaints that comes from people in this demographic is the loss of independence. Whether that loss comes from being a fall risk, generalized weakness, or other illnesses, vertigo or dizziness can be a major contributing factor. People 65 and older are the largest demographic that suffers from vestibular issues and by the time people turn 70, 50% of them will have experienced some sort of vestibular impairment and/or vertigo.



The vestibular system works in conjunction with the

visual and somatosensory systems creating a “tripod” of balance. This essentially means people rely on their vision, feet, and vestibular system to keep them upright and aware of where they are at all times. When one leg of the tripod is negatively impacted, it becomes difficult or even impossible for someone to safely navigate the world.

People who suffer from conditions affecting the vision and somatosensory components of the tripod are more at risk of falls and associated vestibular impairments. For example, diabetes is a condition that affects the blood vessels in your body and can cause neuropathy, or decreased sensation, in the feet and hands. The feet are a key component of the somatosensory part of the balance tripod. If an individual cannot feel their feet, they become more reliant on their vision and vestibular system to keep them upright. Now, what happens if your vision is impaired, you have diabetes, and some sort of vestibular dysfunction? All three legs of your balance tripod are adversely affected which greatly increases your likelihood of a fall and further injury. Other conditions that negatively impact these systems can include peripheral artery disease, head trauma, migraines, and strokes.

One of the most commonly discussed vestibular conditions is benign paroxysmal positional vertigo or BPPV for short. Many people may be familiar with this term but do not know what it means or how it can affect them. BPPV refers to when the otoconia, small crystal like structures housed in the utricle of the inner ear, get loose and make their way into the semicircular canals. This affects the way your brain perceives where you are in space, predominantly when changing position (i.e. from sitting to laying down or when rolling over in bed). It can cause severe vertigo, nausea, vomiting, and sweating. Attacks usually last for less



than one minute and resolve once the head returns to a neutral position. These attacks can occur every time the individual moves their head into a position that is affected by gravity as mentioned above. It can make for some pretty uncomfortable transitions and create a fear of movement if left untreated.

Now for the good news, BPPV is easily treated! There are simple maneuvers a physical therapist is qualified to take you through that help return the otoconia to their home in the utricle thus restoring normal function of the vestibular system. PTs can also help patients by providing them with a generalized strengthening and balance program to correct any remaining deficits.



There are other conditions that can cause dizziness and vertigo such as migraines, concussions or head traumas, vestibular neuritis, labyrinthitis, Meniere's disease, acoustic neuromas, and toxicity. Vestibular conditions often misdiagnosed by traditional healthcare providers which is why it is VERY important that individuals suffering from dizziness consult with their primary care physician, a neurologist, AND a physical therapist to determine the cause of their dizziness and to receive the appropriate treatment.

- Jessie Glennon PT, DPT
for The Magnolia News



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