

Dizziness? Inner Ear Problems? Vestibular Rehabilitation and You



Dr. Larry Lake is a licensed psychotherapist and the CEO of BayView, as well as its parent organization, the St. Johns Welfare Federation. Lake says, “as a local non-profit healthcare provider, we are excited about how

this FORUM can help share the knowledge and expertise of the more than 250 healthcare professionals at BayView and across our continuum of care. In each issue we will address an area of interest to help consumers be even more informed about their health and wellness.”

This FORUM focuses on inner ear dysfunction, an often under-diagnosed medical condition that does not discriminate by age or gender. It affects the young and the old, men and women. Dizziness is the most common complaint that brings people over 70 years of age to their primary physician. Considering all

age groups, it is the third most common complaint to doctors in general. The emergence of Vestibular Rehabilitation has proven to be a successful treatment option for many patients with dizziness and imbalance issues.

Lee Spannhake, MPT is Vestibular Rehabilitation Certified and is the lead physical therapist for BayView Home Health. She answers many important questions in this FORUM helping us better understand what inner ear dysfunction is, when to seek medical treatment and how effective Vestibular Rehabilitation can be in helping patients.

that patients will hold onto walls and furniture when walking.

How else is the vestibular system important?

In addition to controlling our equilibrium, our vestibular system allows for clear vision while the head is in motion. Someone who is experiencing a vestibular problem may complain of “jumpy” or “blurred” vision with head movements. As you can imagine, this can be very disabling. It can affect all aspects of daily living including the simple act of walking and reading signs while driving. It will affect any kind of activity that includes rapid head movements. Our vestibular system also helps control upright posture. If this reflex is not working properly, it can cause you to be uncoordinated when walking, walk with your feet spread far apart and drifting to one side. It is easy to see how this puts them at a much higher risk for falling and experiencing injury.

Why is the inner ear so important?

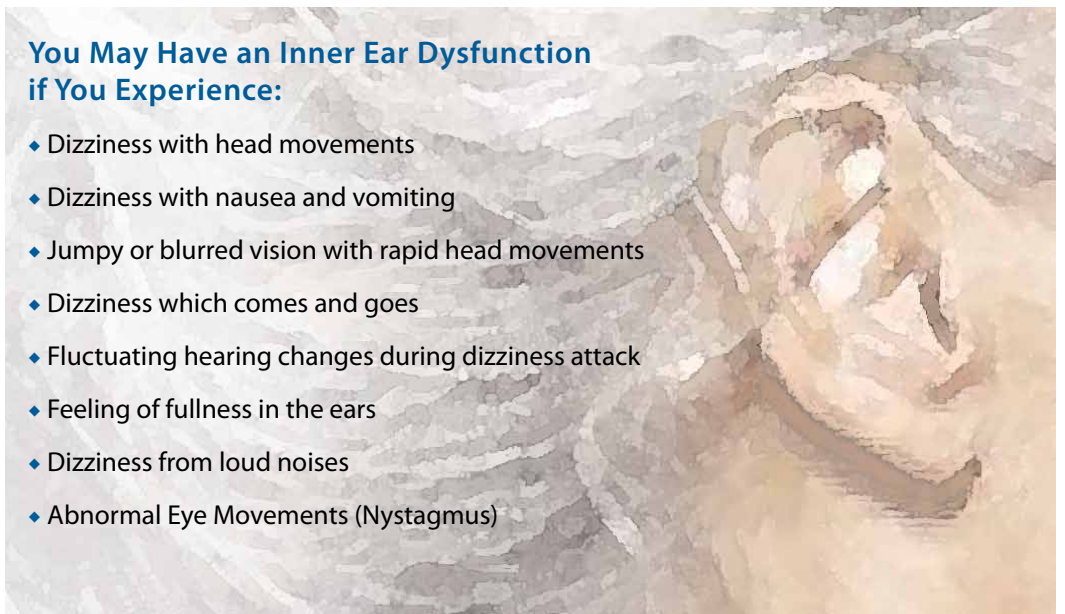
The inner ear houses organs that help make up our Vestibular System. This system is what tells us if we are moving or if the world around us is moving. It tells us if we are going up or down, turning or going from side to side. Up to two-thirds of our balance, is controlled through our vestibular system. If there is a problem (dysfunction) in any part of this system, one of the side effects can be a form of dizziness called vertigo.

What is Vertigo?

Vertigo is simply a false sense of movement. It's the sensation of spinning and a major symptom of a balance disorder. It can cause nausea, vomiting and difficulty walking. It can be so debilitating,

You May Have an Inner Ear Dysfunction if You Experience:

- ◆ Dizziness with head movements
- ◆ Dizziness with nausea and vomiting
- ◆ Jumpy or blurred vision with rapid head movements
- ◆ Dizziness which comes and goes
- ◆ Fluctuating hearing changes during dizziness attack
- ◆ Feeling of fullness in the ears
- ◆ Dizziness from loud noises
- ◆ Abnormal Eye Movements (Nystagmus)



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Can Vestibular Dysfunction be treated?

Yes! Many vestibular dysfunctions can be helped with Vestibular Rehabilitation Therapy or VRT. VRT is the use of head, body and coordinated eye exercises. The treatment of vestibular disorders began over 60 years ago but has recently gained popularity and clinical respect in the medical

community. Physical therapists, occupational therapists, physicians and audiologists who have received specialized training can perform VRT.

How does vestibular rehabilitation work?

The main premise of VRT is that our brain can adapt and compensate when there is a vestibular deficit. A qualified therapist will customize exercises to retrain the brain to adjust or adapt to the vestibular system problem, and subsequently, improving a person's balance and posture. For example, there is a problem with a two propeller airplane while in flight. One of the propellers is operating at half the speed of the other. The plane is in flight, there is no way to repair the propeller. The airplane computer then has to kick in and adapt to the imbalanced propeller speed to keep the airplane safely in flight. VRT is like the airplane computer, it assists in retraining the brain to adjust or adapt to the vestibular problem.

these crystals in the inner ear get loose from their normal location and travel into another part of the inner ear. Now a signal tells your brain you are moving when in actuality you are not. This causes sudden vertigo with nausea, vomiting, sweating, and abnormal eye movements during particular head movements. People experiencing BPPV will often complain that rolling in a certain direction while lying in bed or looking up or down will initiate the vertigo. When treating this type of vestibular dysfunction, a therapist will assess where the crystals are located. Once determined, the therapist utilizes specific maneuvers to facilitate the crystals

moving back to where they belong. It can take as little as two visits to treat this condition.

The second most common vestibular disorder is called Vestibular Neuritis. This disorder is often caused by a viral infection to the vestibular nerve in the inner ear. It is typical for people with Vestibular Neuritis to have had a respiratory or gastrointestinal infection prior to the onset of the vertigo. People with this disorder will experience intense vertigo with nausea and vomiting and these symptoms that can last up to three months. Often, patients will suffer balance problems after the vertigo disappears, so VRT can help them get back to safe functioning! *ry*



Lee Spannhake MPT is the lead Physical Therapist for BayView Home Health and is certified in Vestibular Rehabilitation from the American Institute of Balance.

"I couldn't lie on my right side because the room would spin.

I started experiencing walking issues where I felt that I was being pulled to the right. I had to lean on the wall to stop myself from falling. Lee administered two treatments and all symptoms were resolved.

It worked beautifully!"
Shirley Robertson

What common disorders can benefit from VRT?

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo or BPPV is the most common vestibular disorder. Approximately 50% of all people over 70 years of age will experience BPPV. Within the inner ear, there are small calcium carbonate crystals called *otoconia*. The job of these crystals is to help tell your brain when you are moving. With BPPV,

Other Causes of Dizziness:

- Headaches or migraines
- High or low blood pressure
- Sudden drop of blood pressure with change in positioning (*orthostatic hypotension*)
- Cervical spine (neck) disorders
- Stroke
- Tumors
- Medications
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
- Dehydration/ Diuretics
- Hypoxia (low blood oxygen)
- Weakness/Deconditioning
- Anemia
- Depression, anxiety, and panic attacks
- Heart attack
- Arrhythmias
- Arteriosclerosis
- Neuropathy

Vestibular Dysfunctions are common and many are treatable. See your physician to assess the cause and if VRT is right for you!

BayView is part of the St. Johns Welfare Federation, a private not-for-profit comprehensive continuum of healthcare provider founded in 1920. The organization's superior level of services includes short-term inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, skilled nursing (Samantha Wilson Care Center), BayView Home Health, and assisted living (The Pavilion at BayView and Buckingham Smith) and the Community Charitable Assistance Program. Fundraising also is carried out by Caring Hands - Caring Community, a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization founded by the parent organization. Through Caring Hands - Caring Community 100% of all donations go toward local charitable and uncompensated care and services. No donated funds are used to pay executive salaries or administrative overhead.



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