

What is Vestibular Rehabilitation?

Over 10 million patients annually will visit a physician due to dizziness. It is the most common complaint for patients over the age of 75, but can occur in patients of all ages.

Dizziness can be described in many ways for example: lightheadedness, vertigo (spinning), wooziness (swimming feeling in head), imbalance (unsteadiness), and syncope (the feeling of passing out). These symptoms can last in duration from seconds to days and may also vary in frequency from daily to intermittently.

Often times the symptom of dizziness is due to many influences. The vestibular system is usually the primary source of symptoms but the heart and the brain may also affect the symptoms.

The vestibular system senses head motion and position to aide in maintaining balance and gaze stability. When a vestibular problem exists; a patient may avoid head movements because it may increase their dizziness and/or symptoms. Due to the lack of head movements the patient may also suffer from neck tightness and pain. Patients with vestibular disorders may also feel the need to hold onto objects when walking due to imbalance and or the inability to keep his/her vision stable.

Who Performs the Test?

Once evaluated by a physician who specializes in vestibular disorders the patients may be referred to vestibular rehabilitation/ physical therapy. Impairments, functional limitations and disabilities will be identified by the physical therapist on the initial visit. Once the patient's problems are identified, the physical therapist develops a specialized plan of care that focuses on improving these deficits.

What Happens During the Evaluation?

The goal of physical therapy for vestibular disorders is to get the patient comfortable moving their head to reintegrate the vestibular system and to prevent any unnecessary falls due to their symptoms. Physical therapy may also include: posture education, ergonomics, strengthening, stretching, balance retraining and promoting generalized fitness.