



information

Dizziness after concussion

Dizziness is a very common symptom after concussion. But there are several different conditions that patients may refer to as “dizziness.” This includes vertigo, balance issues, and lightheadedness.

The descriptions below may help you tell your doctor what kind of dizziness you are feeling and gives general information on how each type of dizziness might be treated.

Vertigo

This is the sensation of spinning. It is like the feeling you might have after getting off of a carnival ride. A related symptom is the feeling that you are being pushed over to one side.

When these symptoms occur after a head injury, they are almost always caused by injury to the inner ear, which controls balance in the body. Injury to the inner ear can occur with a skull fracture near the ear, or even just from the jarring of the skull that happens during head injury. The dizziness in this case is related to the inner ear and is not part of a brain injury itself.

Vertigo can come with nausea and vomiting. It can cause very poor balance. Because the problem is in the ear, it can sometimes affect the hearing structures. This can cause ringing in the ears (tinnitus), or hearing other noises or rushing sounds.

The spinning feeling of vertigo always improves fairly quickly. A mild sense of unsteadiness and sensitivity to motion may last longer. Ringing in the ears can last longer as well.

There is a very specific version of vertigo called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) that is common after head injury. This is often caused by a fall onto the back of the head, but it can be caused by other things as well. This type of vertigo is usually brought on by changing positions or rolling to one side. A treatment called the “Epley maneuver” can sometimes help with BPPV. During the Epley maneuver, a doctor or physical therapist moves the head into various positions in a particular order. This can help move small particles of calcium in the inner ear fluid that may be causing the problem.

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Balance Issues

It is much more common for people with head injury to have a vague sense of poor balance, rather than true vertigo. This can also be from damage to the inner ear. Patients may not trust their balance. When walking on surfaces that are uneven or slippery, they may want to reach out to hold onto something solid. They may be bothered by motion, even on a computer or TV screen, and may have motion sickness. Ringing in the ears can also occur.

These types of problems can get better by gradually increasing activity and exposure to motion. Most people have a complete recovery from these symptoms. In rare cases, patients may have a mild, unpleasant sense of unsteadiness that doesn't go away. You may be referred to physical therapy for help with balance. If balance problems persist, a special type of therapy called Vestibular Rehabilitation may be useful.

Lightheadedness

Some people will say they feel “dizzy” when they are lightheaded. This feeling often occurs when you first stand up and may be due to a brief period of low blood pressure as your body adjusts to standing. This can happen if there is dehydration or prolonged inactivity. It usually gets better on its own over time. Drinking fluids should help if the problem is related to dehydration.