

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

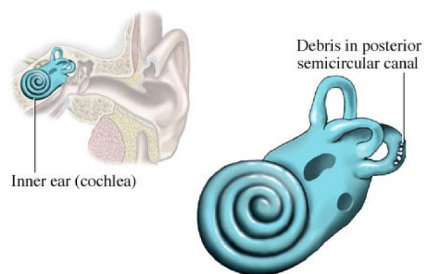


What is benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV)?

Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo is an inner ear problem that causes a spinning or whirling sensation when you move your head. That sensation is called vertigo. This vertigo usually lasts for less than a minute. It may be mild, or it may be bad enough to cause nausea.

What causes BPPV?

Experts do not know for sure, but suspect that particles of calcium normally found in your ear break off and float into the ear's semicircular canal. Once there, they interfere with your balance and cause vertigo. Medicines, disease, aging, or a head injury are some of the things that may cause the particles to break off. Anyone can develop BPPV.



What are the symptoms of BPPV?

The main symptom is vertigo—a feeling of spinning, whirling, or tilting—that occurs when you move your head certain ways. Turning over in bed, turning your head quickly, bending over, or tipping your head back may cause it. Sometimes the vertigo then causes nausea and vomiting.

When you repeat that head movement 3 or 4 times, the vertigo may get better each time and then stop happening. This is called fatigability. Only after several hours will the same movement again give you vertigo.

How is BPPV diagnosed?

BPPV is diagnosed with a physical examination and medical history. Your health professional may also have you perform the Dix-Hallpike test. For this, he or she will move your body and head in certain directions while watching the involuntary movements of your eyes. The pattern of your eye movements helps determine the cause of your vertigo.

How is BPPV treated?

Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) may go away in a few weeks by itself. If treatment is needed, it usually consists of head exercises called liberatory maneuvers. These exercises will move the particles out of the semicircular canals of your inner ear to a place where they will not affect your balance.

Over time, your brain may react less and less to the confusing signals triggered by the particles in the inner ear. This is called compensation. Compensation occurs most quickly if you continue normal head movements, even though doing so causes the whirling sensation of vertigo. A Brandt-Daroff exercise may also be done to speed the compensation process.

Medicines called vestibular suppressants (such as antihistamines, sedatives, or scopolamine) reduce vertigo and may be tried if your symptoms are severe.

Why is it important to exercise for balance?

If you experience ongoing bouts of vertigo, no matter what the cause, you have a greater risk of losing your balance and falling. The benefits of doing balance exercises may include:

- Having better balance with less risk of falling and hurting yourself and others. Repeated bouts of vertigo may reduce inner ear function, which leads to a deteriorating sense of balance. These exercises will help you maintain your inner ear function and balance.
- Improving self-confidence and self-esteem. As your balance improves, you may feel more confident that you can get out more and do more with others.

Within a few days to weeks of consistently doing balance exercises, you should notice a decline in vertigo symptoms. In each exercise, start out slowly. Over time, you can gradually try to do the exercise for a longer time or do more repetitions. When you first begin, it is important to have someone with you in case you feel you are going to fall. As you progress, you may be able to do some of the exercises on your own. Walking exercises for vertigo may improve your balance and symptoms of vertigo. A specific start/stop method is used to improve your balance.

Brandt-Daroff exercise for vertigo

The Brandt-Daroff exercise is one of several exercises intended to speed up the compensation process and end the symptoms of vertigo. It often is prescribed for people with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) and sometimes for labyrinthitis. These exercises will not cure these conditions, but over time they can reduce symptoms of vertigo.

The Brandt-Daroff exercise is done as follows:

- Sit on the edge of a bed or sofa, and quickly lean to the side that causes the worst vertigo. You should end up lying on your side with your ear down.
- Remain in this position until either the vertigo goes away or 30 seconds have passed.
- Sit up. If this causes vertigo, wait for it to stop. Repeat the procedure on the other side.

People using this exercise usually are instructed to do 20 repetitions of the exercise at least twice a day.

