

Why am I dizzy? What can I do about it?

by Joanna Remenyi

Many people are grappling to recover their 'normal' balance function after some sort of dizzy episode in life. Some people feel as though dizziness is starting to overwhelm them or stopping them from living life as they would like to do. They frequently want to know "why am I dizzy?"

My role as a vestibular audiologist is to help patients to better understand their dizziness and what can be done to manage it. This involves identifying any triggers that may exacerbate symptoms and learning to address these factors. We encourage anyone with a vestibular concern to contact our clinic and make an appointment with us if they are seeking support with their condition.

As a yoga teacher, I encourage patients to look at their global approach to life and to look at how our attitudes can help us to recover from persistent symptoms such as dizziness. For example, I often hear patients say things like:

"I am always dizzy. I am constantly dizzy. No matter what I do, I am dizzy. I try to push myself and keep going to work... I try getting on with life so that it won't get the better of me. I am frustrated. I get upset and think 'why are you crying, stop it'...I wish that this dizziness would go away so that I could just get on with life".

Being dizzy can mean many different things to different people. Dizziness can totally change a person's quality of life especially if they are living in fear of falling over or spinning out. NO two people have the same symptoms or the same triggers to being dizzy. This article will discuss some different scenarios of dizziness.

First Scenario: The Big Scary Spins...

It is important to recognise that dizziness is a frightening event. We lose control of our senses, the world flips and spins. We can become unsteady, fall over, see visual blur or hear ringing noises. During a spinning attack, there is nothing that we can do except to lay down and be as quiet, still and calm as possible. This part of dizziness is out of our control, the body needs to settle and find its own equilibrium. If we move during a spinning attack (head movements in particular) then this process is further prolonged.

Finding equilibrium after an acute dizzy spell can take anywhere from five seconds to a few hours. During this time, the mind and senses are so ruffled that we can barely think or do basic tasks. Forget reading even a simple sentence!

Rest is the best medicine. When in an acute spell of spinning, try not to talk much and lay flat with your head still.

Second Scenario: Less Scary YET Sudden, Brief, Random Spins in Daily Life...

There are times when you may feel 'not quite right' and this lingers for some days. This may follow from a virus, flu or migraine. During these times of recovery, dizziness may be exacerbated by certain head movements. We may feel quite healthy and upright but at certain moments we spin out for a few seconds and become frustrated, surprised or anxious. This sort of dizziness usually occurs when the ears are trying to recalibrate their inner function. Sometimes, for unknown reasons, the ears can lose calibration! Sudden head movements trigger the dizziness because the ears have made a little error that they are trying to 'relearn' and 'recalibrate'. This is corrective dizziness! It occurs temporarily with some type of body movement as the trigger.

During this time, the best thing to do is stay calm and say to ourselves: *"I am okay, my ears just got confused and it will pass. This trigger is something that I need to practice."*

Once you are calm and settled again, it is a good idea to repeat that same action trigger so that your ears have more opportunity to refine the corrective process. For every little error, the ears need to develop a correction. This does take practice. Initially vestibular physiotherapy helps this process along and for maintenance into the future it is recommended that you try enrolling in a weekly class of yoga or guided activity that you enjoy. Eventually our ears regain their calibration and we feel increasingly steady on our feet. With time and understanding, the dizziness occurs less frequently or when it does occur, it generates far less anxiety or worry.

If we are very anxious, fearful or angry about our daily dizziness this process of recovery and correction can be very much prolonged. Avoiding dizziness can make the situation worse in the long run. The ears simply don't get the exposure to those movements or the practice they need to make little corrections. This is why we encourage patients to face the dizziness and stay calm in that process. Dizziness is ALWAYS temporary.

Third Scenario: Why Am I Dizzy ALL THE TIME?

So you ask, then why do some people feel dizzy all the time? If dizziness seems constant it may not technically be dizziness. Typically we hear reports of an overall sense of fuzziness with heaviness in the eyes or skull that seems to linger for days, months or even years. This lingering fuzziness is not to be confused with vertigo or dizziness. It may be related to a form of persistent headache, migraine, exhaustion or fatigue. Vertigo from the inner ears may also present intermittently on top of feeling 'fuzzy' but the ear-related vertigo is an on/off dizziness rather than constant or lingering. Remember: *dizziness* comes and goes while *fuzziness or fatigue* will linger. Both conditions benefit from staying calm and prioritizing sleep for optimal recovery

Being dizzy can unnecessarily put the breaks on living. How can anyone go to work or get jobs done if they are spinning, vomiting and feeling fatigued? It is true that for a short amount of time, we do need to recover and recuperate from a vertigo attack. However, it is equally important to then maintain routine and not fall into a pattern of avoidance behaviours in the weeks that follow. If you get dizzy in a supermarket for

example, this doesn't mean you need to avoid it- instead try a smaller shop first and when you feel a bit stronger attempt returning to the supermarket. Take a friend if you feel that you need support. Social support is fundamental however learning to get your independence back also needs to be part of the recovery- becoming dependent on other people is not a long term solution. Keep living your life. Dizziness can put you in bed for a day or perhaps a week but it is not a life sentence. Nobody is a dizzy person forever... dizziness comes and goes.

Lingering fuzziness and disorientation are often associated with sleep disturbance, life trauma or some sort of prolonged exhaustion. The body may be in great need of rest: physical, emotional and mental rest. **These are all concepts that we discuss with patients during a one-on-one appointment in the University of Melbourne Balance Management Clinic.**

Once patients learn what their limitations are and begin to prioritise their health and wellbeing, the lingering symptoms have an opportunity to settle and anxiety abates. It is very important that we all get enough sleep, eat well and seek support from friends and family. We cannot expect our ears to recover if we live life at full pelt. Without our basic needs being met, we are vulnerable to symptoms such as dizziness.

By learning to manage our daily choices we can prevent exhaustion and stay resilient.

Lastly, in order to prevent relapse, we encourage patients to enroll in a weekly hobby that keeps them active and happy. Yoga is very good as it helps us to relieve stress, it gets our ears working on different planes of gravity which helps to keep them calibrated and yoga also helps to strengthen our physical, emotional and mental 'bodies'. Yoga offers us a safe place to challenge our dizziness and promote recovery.

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