

Self-Quiz for Dizziness or Balance Problems

- ☐ Do you get a feeling of motion, spinning, or falling when moving your head quickly or changing your position, e.g., getting in or out of bed?
- ☐ Are you uncomfortable trying to move around in the dark?
- ☐ Do you feel off-balance when walking down aisles and hallways?
- ☐ Do your feet sometimes not go where you want them to go?
- ☐ Do you ever experience a sense of unsteadiness? A feeling that you are not sure-footed?
- ☐ Do you ever experience a fear of falling or stumbling?
- ☐ Does looking at moving objects such as escalators or out the side window of a car make you queasy?
- ☐ Do you have difficulty keeping your balance as you walk on different surfaces, e.g., walking from a tile floor onto carpet?
- ☐ Do you ever have a feeling that you are drifting or being pulled to one side when you are walking?
- ☐ Do you feel like others do not understand your symptoms of unbalance or dizziness?

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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF AUDIOLOGY 
800-AAA-2336
www.audiology.org

Feeling Dizzy?

Evaluation of the
Balance System



American Academy of Audiology

Feeling Dizzy?

You are not alone. It is estimated that at least half the population of the United States will be affected by dizziness or balance problems during their lifetime. Balance disorders that cause dizziness may create a variety of problems including imbalance, disorientation, and blurred vision—all of which interfere with quality of life and may lead to serious falls. Balance problems may occur suddenly or develop slowly over time. Dizziness affects people in all age groups but is most prevalent in the elderly. Many dizzy patients may be helped through nonmedical and nonsurgical techniques. There is no medication that effectively treats the complaints of dysequilibrium, unsteadiness, or imbalance. These problems require a thorough assessment of the balance system followed by customized therapy to treat the specific symptom.

Most episodes of dizziness are associated with disorders of the balance mechanism, or, as it is known in medical terms, the *vestibular system*. The vestibular system includes a network of complex interconnected pathways between the inner ear, the eyes, the brain, and the nerves of the spine. The vestibular system allows us to interact with our surroundings in a safe, efficient manner. When any part of the vestibular system malfunctions, a wide variety of potentially disabling symptoms may follow. In fact, the word *dizziness* describes many different symptoms, including

- A sensation of spinning or rotation (vertigo)
- Feeling faint, particularly noticeable when standing (lightheadedness)
- Feeling disconnected from, and out of sync with, one's environment (disorientation)



- Feeling off-balance or unsteady or having the inability to walk a straight line (dysequilibrium)
- Decreased visual clarity associated with head movement (visual blurring)
- A sense of discomfort, even fear, of moving about in open, public spaces (anxiety)
- Falls, or even a serious stumble, which can reduce one's mobility and sense of independence (fear of falling)

Why Me?

Often dizziness is caused by medical conditions such as hypertension or diabetes, or is a side effect of prescription medications. You should discuss your symptoms with your physician. If your dizziness, lightheadness, or feelings of dysequilibrium persist, your physician may refer you to an audiologist for a comprehensive evaluation of your problem and, if indicated, treatment to relieve your symptoms. The audiologist is an essential member of the health-care team helping to identify the cause of your problem.

The Role of the Audiologist

Audiologists are the professionals dedicated to helping people with hearing and balance problems. As part of their scope of practice, audiologists are trained to understand vestibular function, and many participate in the nonmedical evaluation and treatment of patients who are experiencing dizziness. The audiologist's evaluation of your dizziness and/or balance problem may use a



number of highly technical tests and procedures to identify the source of the problem:

- Advanced diagnostic hearing tests
- Auditory brainstem response (ABR)
- Videonystagmography (VNG)
- Electronystagmography (ENG)
- Vestibular evoked myogenic potentials (VEMPs)
- Dynamic visual acuity testing
- Active head rotation (AHR)
- Electrocochleography (ECoG)
- Sensory organization or postural stability testing
- Rotary chair testing

Audiologists provide hearing and balance services at medical centers, hospitals and clinics, and in private practice locations. A qualified audiologist holds a graduate degree from an accredited university, has obtained state licensure, and may have achieved board certification in audiology. Audiologists complete a full-time clinical internship following a rigid academic training course and have passed a national competency examination. The American Academy of Audiology guides its member audiologists with a strict *Code of Ethics* requiring the highest standards of professional practice.

What Now?

According to research studies, 85 percent of all dizziness and balance problems can be accurately diagnosed and successfully treated following a thorough evaluation. You don't have to live with dizziness, lightheadedness, or feelings of being off balance. Help is available. If you have questions or would like more information, speak with an audiologist.