



What is Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) ?

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo is a common inner ear problem that affects the vestibular system. This system works to maintain your balance. BPPV causes short periods of dizziness when moving your head into certain positions.

Inside the inner ear, there is a layer of calcium carbonate material called otoconia. People often refer to pieces of the otoconia as crystals. BPPV occurs when these crystals break off and move to a part of the inner ear called the semicircular canal. There are three different semicircular canals that otoconia could be in.

How does it feel?

BPPV occurs most commonly after a position change. This dizzy sensation is brief and intense and usually lasts for about 15 to 45 seconds.

Some changes in position that may cause your symptoms include:

- Lying down.
- Turning over in bed.
- Bending over.
- Looking up.

Symptoms may last longer if the crystals become stuck to part of the inner ear. Episodes of vertigo frequently occur for weeks or months at a time. When vertigo occurs, you may feel like the room is spinning around you. You also may feel light-headed, off-balance, or nauseous.

How is BPPV diagnosed?

BPPV is diagnosed if you have a particular kind of involuntary eye movement called nystagmus, and whether you have vertigo when your head is moved into certain positions. Your physical therapist will perform tests to see whether vertigo and involuntary eye movement are present.

Physical therapists use positional tests to recreate BPPV symptoms. These tests require moving your head in specific ways. They will help your physical therapist determine the cause and type of your dizziness. During these tests, your physical therapist will watch your eyes for specific movements. This will help them determine the right treatment maneuver to reduce or eliminate your vertigo.

There are many causes of dizziness. Dizziness is often hard for people to describe. This can make the source of dizziness challenging to diagnose. Be sure to discuss any recent illnesses or injuries, problems with your immune system, changes in medications or hormones, and whether you have headaches. These clues will help your physical therapist make an accurate diagnosis, or indicate the need for a referral to another specialist.

How can a Physical Therapist help?

Fortunately, the majority of people with BPPV can be treated with simple and specific maneuvers that involve moving the head and body. Your physical therapist will perform an evaluation and determine which maneuver is right for you. These maneuvers are designed to move the crystals from the semicircular canal back into the appropriate area in the inner ear (the utricle).

Physical therapists use their education and experience to evaluate and treat dizziness and imbalance.

You may want to consider:

- A physical therapist who is experienced in treating people with neurological problems.
- A physical therapist with specialized training and/or experience in vestibular rehabilitation.