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Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

Benign--meaning it is usually treatable easily

Paroxysmal--meaning the dizziness comes in spurts, then stops in periods of stillness

Positional--meaning the dizziness occurs with movement/changes in your position

Vertigo--meaning room spinning, rather than just lightheadedness

Instructions:

1. For the next 2-3 days, try to sleep with your head upright, either in a recliner or propped up on several pillows. If you cannot due to discomfort, the next safest position is on your side with the treated ear down.
2. Limit all sharp head movements. Do not do any movements that would have previously brought on the dizziness. Tilting the head backward while washing the hair or looking to change lanes while driving are common things to avoid.
3. After this time period, slowly work back into your normal activities.
4. Dysequilibrium may continue for a couple weeks because the affected ear is irritated. However, the room spinning should not recur. If this does recur, please call our office as we may need to repeat the repositioning maneuver.

What is BPPV?

It is thought that BPPV is caused by one or more tiny solid fragments/crystals (otoconia) that float about in the fluid of the labyrinth. The fragments are made up of calcium carbonate

crystals which are thought to have broken off from the inside lining of the vestibule part of the labyrinth. These cause no problems if the fragment remains in the vestibule. However, problems occur if a fragment gets into one of the semicircular canals.

The posterior canal is the usual one affected. In this situation, when your head is still, the fragment sits at the bottom of the posterior canal. But when the head moves in certain directions the fragment gets carried along with the flow of fluid.

The fragment brushes along the delicate hairs that line the semicircular canal and this bombards messages down the vestibular nerve. The extra nerve messages sent from the affected ear conflict with the normal messages sent from the other unaffected ear. The brain becomes very confused and reacts to cause intense dizziness (vertigo).

What are the symptoms of benign paroxysmal positional vertigo?

The main symptom is intense dizziness (vertigo). The vertigo lasts just a short time - typically just for 10-20 seconds and usually no longer than a minute. It then goes away completely. The vertigo is usually triggered by a change in head position. For example, getting out of bed and rolling over in bed are two of the most common movements that trigger a short episode of vertigo. Sometimes just looking up triggers an episode of vertigo.

With each episode of vertigo you may feel sick (nauseated) but it is not common to be sick (vomit). The nausea may last an hour or so even though the vertigo lasts just seconds.

Between episodes of BPPV you feel well. Many people who develop BPPV realize which head movements trigger their symptoms and so instinctively avoid doing those movements.

Why did this happen?

It is not clear why these otoconia form or drop off from the inside lining of the labyrinth. Most cases of BPPV occur in people over the age of 40. Therefore, it may be an age-related thing. BPPV is one of the most common causes of vertigo in older people. However, some younger people develop BPPV following an injury to the ear, or following a previous infection in the inner ear. Sometimes it occurs in younger people for no apparent reason. Women are affected about twice as often as men.