

Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV)

BPPV is a common cause of dizziness. It occurs in people of all ages but is more common in middle-aged and elderly people. It causes short bursts of intense dizziness when the body or head is placed in certain positions such as lying on one side in bed or looking upwards. People can feel sick and are sometimes unsteady for a few hours after the dizziness has gone away.

Benign – this means the cause of dizziness is not a threat to your health.

Paroxysmal – the dizziness comes in short bursts.

Positional – the dizziness is provoked by certain body or head positions.

Vertigo – the medical name for the spinning sensation.

What causes the dizziness?

The dizziness is caused when small crystals float away from another part of the ear and find their way into one of the semi-circular canals. There are three semi-circular canals in each of your ears and they detect which direction your head is moving in. So, when you put your head into certain positions, the crystals move about in the canal making your brain think that you are moving, when in fact you are not. If you stay in the position that makes you dizzy for a minute or so, the crystals will usually float to the bottom of the canal and stay there – this is when the dizziness wears off.

The crystals can become unstuck from their normal place, as a result of head injury, or following an infection of the inner ear, but most commonly it happens for no particular reason. It is usually just in one ear but occasionally people have it in both ears at the same time.

How is BPPV diagnosed?

BPPV is diagnosed by your description of the problem you have been experiencing and the result of a test for BPPV. Normally, the semi-circular canals tell the brain which way your head is moving so that the brain can move the eyes in the right direction. Because of this we can tell if something is wrong with your semi-circular canals by looking at your eyes. If you have got BPPV, your eyes will move in certain ways when your head is placed in a position that makes you feel dizzy.

Treatment

It is common for BPPV to clear up by itself after a few weeks or months and no treatment is required. If it does not resolve itself treatment is a safe, simple and quick procedure. For most patients the dizziness is stopped after just one treatment, though occasionally the treatment may need to be repeated a second or third time.

To stop the dizziness we have to move the crystals back to where they came from. This can be done by moving your body and head through a series of slow, controlled movements. The exact positions will depend on which canal the crystals are in and whether the crystals are floating around or have become attached to another part of the ear

What happens after the treatment?

It is not unusual to feel imbalanced or slightly unwell for up to 48 hours after treatment. After this, if the treatment has been successful, you should be able to move into positions that used to make you dizzy without any problems.

Whilst at home some patients may be advised to try a series of specific head movements whilst lying down, if this is the case your doctor will have discussed this with you.

If you continue to have symptoms more than one week please contact your GP.

What happens if the dizziness comes back?

It is not unusual for BPPV to return after a few months or years. If it does come back, you should contact your GP.

General advice about Vertigo:

Avoid movements that trigger vertigo: Be mindful of head positions that cause dizziness and try to minimize them.

Get out of bed slowly: Sit on the edge of the bed for a few minutes before standing up to allow the dizziness to subside.

Use good lighting: Turn on lights if getting up at night to reduce the risk of falls.

Use a walking stick if necessary: If you're at risk of falling, a walking stick can provide stability.

Avoid driving while dizzy: If vertigo occurs while driving, inform the DVLA and avoid driving until symptoms are under control.

Manage anxiety: Anxiety can worsen vertigo, so try to relax and manage stress.

Acknowledgements:

<https://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Audiology/Benign-paroxysmal-positional-vertigo-1279-PIL.pdf> accessed 30.07.2025

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google ChatGPT

If you need further advice, please contact the Emergency Department – details below
Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.

For additional medical advice, if your symptoms or condition worsens:

Contact your GP

NHS 111:

Get help with your symptoms, NHS111:
Information to help you manage your health:

Telephone 111

<https://111.nhs.uk/>
www.nhs.uk

In an emergency telephone 999

Emergency Department (A&E)
Alexandra Hospital
Woodrow Drive
Redditch B98 7UB

Tel: 01527 512030

Minor Injury Unit
Kidderminster Hospital
Bewdley Road
Kidderminster DY11 6RJ

Tel: 01562 513039

Emergency Department (A&E)
Worcestershire Royal Hospital
Charles Hastings Way
Worcester WR5 1DD

Tel: 01905 760743