



What can I do to help when I am dizzy?

Some tips to try when you
feel dizzy

Sorry to hear that you, or someone you care about is suffering from dizziness, vertigo and/or disequilibrium.

When dizziness or vertigo strikes it can be very scary and debilitating – the loss of control and difficulty doing simple tasks is challenging to cope with.

It can be a lonely time, and it is very easy to become anxious and believe your symptoms will never go away.

Thankfully, there is a lot we can do to help – and you don't just need take my word for it, there is plenty of scientific research to back this up!

This booklet contains a few tips to help you manage your symptoms and to help you start feeling ‘rebalanced’ again.

I hope you find this guide helpful, but if you still have questions, or would like to discuss your situation, just give me a call on 07401 842 311 or e-mail info@dizzinesstherapy.co.uk.

Best wishes in your recovery,

John Gonzalez
Dizziness, Balance & Concussion Centre

Thankfully, the vast majority of dizziness and vertigo symptoms are not triggered by serious medical conditions, but it's always better to be on the safe side.

Here are some quick ways to rule out more serious and urgent issues which need urgent medical care. If there is any doubt please go and seek medical attention immediately.

1. Rule out serious pathology

Stroke

A common fear many people with dizziness or vertigo have, is stroke. The F.A.S.T acronym looks at some of the common issues seen with strokes.

F – Face weakness, able to smile? Asymmetry? Eyes drooped?
A – Arm weakness – can they raise their arms?
S – Speech problems – can they speak clearly and understand what you're saying?
T – Time to call 999 if any of these symptoms are present

Other conditions to look out for:

- ‘Thunderclap’ headache – a sudden headache, which is severe straight away and often described as ‘the worst headache of my life’
- Head trauma
- Pins and needles/ numbness in the face or arms which is different from your ‘arm falling asleep’
- Vision issues
- Sudden loss of hearing
- Difficulties swallowing or speaking

This is not a comprehensive list and even if you do experience any of these symptoms, there can be many benign causes, but it is always best to get checked out to be sure.

What can I do if dizziness or vertigo strikes?

2. Short term methods

➤ Stop the trigger/ stimulus

This is not always as easy as it sounds, especially if your symptoms have just started and you don't know what the trigger is. Common ones are movements such as tipping your head back when washing your hair, or reading in a car.

➤ Medication

Medications can help to ease the symptoms in some cases, but shouldn't be used all the time and do not 'cure' the vestibular system. Usually more helpful in chronic cases

➤ Controlled breathing and relaxation

When the body loses control – similar to when it experiences dizziness or vertigo – it goes into 'Fight or Flight'. This means the body increases its breathing rate and pumps more blood to the limbs – it also confuses the brain, making your symptoms worse.

3. Longer term methods

➤ Vestibular rehabilitation

This involves exercises which target the area of the struggling vestibular and balance systems. Rehabilitation improves their function or gets the other system working better to compensate – leading to significant improvements.

➤ Support groups

Speaking to other who are going through, or have been through the same issues you are, can be very useful for emotional support, your understanding and for picking up tips on how to cope.

➤ Dietary changes

For some, certain foods can make their issues worse – one of the common issues is a diet high in salt. However, before cutting out certain food groups entirely it is best to speak to a professional with knowledge of vestibular conditions.

➤ Lifestyle planning/ stress reduction

Since it is known that stress and anxiety make dizziness and vertigo worse, finding effective strategies to cope with stresses can help you cope with vestibular issues. The next section discusses this further.

Dizziness and vertigo are stressful!

Many who have not experienced dizziness or vertigo (maybe yourself before you suffered) do not realise how stressful, anxious and scary being dizzy and unbalanced can be.

We take for granted that we are steady on our feet and that the world is steady in our eyes. This is not the case in dizziness and vertigo sufferers and it impacts every aspect of life – if that is not stressful I don't know what is!

The body responds through the 'Fight or Flight' response – some people are aware this is happening, but many don't realise as it is a sub-conscious response.

However, in cases of dizziness and vertigo it generally makes the symptoms worse –with studies showing that most people are less able to cope with dizziness when stressed.

In fact, at times of stress and trauma anyone can experience dizziness and/or sickness, not just those with underlying vestibular issues.

Unfortunately, for those with vestibular issues it can make the symptoms even worse.

Thankfully there are techniques which can help!

Controlled breathing

Controlled diaphragmatic breathing – why does this help?

The vagus nerve plays a major role in controlling our heart and breathing rates. It also initiates the release of acetylcholine, which counteracts the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, released by the fight or flight response.

When we breathe deeply, our stomach rising with each breath, it affects the vagus nerve. This leads to a physiological process, which helps to calm us down.

So how do we do it?

Find a comfortable position – at first it is easier to perform in lying or sitting – with no distractions, and slowly breathe in and out by making your stomach go in and out (not using your chest).

Aim for around six breathes a minute (four seconds to breathe in, pause for two seconds and four seconds to breathe out) other combinations can also be helpful.

Try and complete five minutes a day – you can build up to this – but if you feel light headed or more dizzy or any other symptoms, then stop and breathe normally.

Like most things, the more you practice the better you will become at it and then you can use the technique when out and about with little effort.

Relaxation

There are many ways to relax and what helps one person can be very different to the next.

This technique helps the muscles and body to relax, so give it a go:

Find a place to sit or lie down with no distractions and your eyes closed.

Then, starting at your head or your feet, tense your muscles for five seconds and relax – saying the word ‘relax’ or thinking it to yourself at the same time.

For instance, tense your calves for five seconds and relax, then work your way up through your body by tensing your quads, buttocks, stomach, chest, hands and forearms, neck and shoulders, cheeks and mouth and forehead for five seconds each then relaxing.

Why does this work? Muscles have been found to relax more, straight after a period of strong contraction and with your brain mentally focusing on the area to relax – so by tightening the muscles and then actively telling the area to relax, it can help to ease any tension.

Repeat the process daily so it becomes easier to perform.

I hope these techniques and advice help in what is a stressful and frustrating time.

If you still have any questions or would like to speak to us about your situation, give us a call on 07401 842 311 or e-mail info@dizzinesstherapy.co.uk and we'll be in touch to see how we can help.



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