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## **The Impact of Aging on Balance and Dizziness – A Physical Therapist’s Perspective**

Dizziness and balance disorders occur frequently in older people. In fact, for adults over age 65, dizziness is one of the most common reasons for visits to physicians and hospitalizations. Falls are frequently a result of dizziness and/or unsteadiness, which is a serious health concern among older adults.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

Symptoms of dizziness vary. Some people describe it as a “spinning” sensation or “vertigo.” Others describe dizziness as a general feeling of unsteadiness, lightheadedness, or as a “rocking” or “floating” sensation, as if on a boat. Regardless of how dizziness is described, it can result in a number of problems, including difficulty walking, nausea, anxiety, fatigue, inability to concentrate, and even depression. Dizziness can also cause people to be afraid to move. Above all, it can increase the likelihood that an individual will fall, which can lead to injuries and even death.

### ***What causes dizziness and/or imbalance?***

Although there are natural physical changes that occur as we age, dizziness and loss of balance are not “just part of getting older.” The causes of dizziness and balance problems vary. In some cases, a condition of the inner ear such as benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) may be the cause. Symptoms of BPPV include a “spinning” type of dizziness when moving the head into specific positions that does not last long but is very frightening.

Dizziness and imbalance can also be due to poor posture and/or decreased strength, flexibility, and endurance—all commonly associated with aging. Other causes include injuries from falls and motor vehicle accidents; inner ear infections or diseases, such as Meniere’s; diseases of the brain and/or nervous system, for example Parkinson disease; and the use of certain medicines or a combination of medicines. Often, there is more than one reason for dizziness and balance problems, especially in older adults.

### ***How can a physical therapist help?***

The good news is that most dizziness and balance disorders can be successfully treated by a physical therapist who has training and experience in vestibular rehabilitation. As the expert in normal movement and stability of the body, a physical therapist with knowledge and expertise in equilibrium disorders will examine your strength, flexibility,

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endurance, walking, and balance to assess your risk of falling and determine the likely cause of the dizziness and balance loss. He or she may do a home visit to evaluate the safety of your home and assess the daily challenges you may be facing in your home environment. Taking your personal goals and prior level of activity into account, a physical therapist will develop a customized treatment plan for you or recommend that you see a physician if further testing is needed.

If you think you have a balance problem or are experiencing dizziness, the best time to act is *now*. Find a vestibular physical therapist near you by going to “Find a PT” at [www.moveforwardpt.com](http://www.moveforwardpt.com) and selecting “Neurologic” under “Expertise.”

Additional information on vestibular physical therapy may be found on the following Web sites: [www.neuropt.org](http://www.neuropt.org) and [www.vestibular.org](http://www.vestibular.org).

**Find a physical therapist in your area at [www.moveforwardpt.com](http://www.moveforwardpt.com)**

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