



The McLaren Balance Center

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

BPPV is a condition which causes dizziness due to debris which has collected in a portion of the inner ear. This debris consists of calcium carbonate crystals [otoconia] that are normally attached to hair cells located in the vestibule of the inner ear. This problem occurs when the otoconia become loose and float to a portion of the ear that they don't belong [usually the Posterior Semicircular Canal]. In some cases the otoconia become loose after an accident where a person hits their head. In other cases it is thought that the hair cells can degenerate with age. In many cases there is no known cause.

What are some of the symptoms associated with BPPV?

Often people with BPPV will complain of dizziness that they describe as a spinning sensation. They feel like the room is spinning or that they are spinning. The dizziness is associated with movement of the head and people will experience dizziness when they look up, or turn over in bed. The dizziness occurs when the calcium carbonate crystals are moving within the semicircular canal. The dizziness lasts until the crystals stop moving [usually only a minute or less]. The dizziness can be severe and even cause nausea and vomiting in some cases. Over time the symptoms get better and often go away on their own as the crystals dissolve or float back to the vestibule. However, symptoms can go on for several weeks or even months before they resolve on their own.

Loss of hearing and ringing in the ear are not usually associated with BPPV. If these symptoms are present and occur with the onset of dizziness, then other diagnoses should be considered.

Treatment Options:

Particle repositioning is the preferred course of treatment and is very effective. This can be done by a Physical or Occupational Therapist and only takes a few minutes in the office. Upon follow-up to the therapist, approximately 90% of patients report that their symptoms of dizziness have resolved.

Often the medication antivert [meclizine hcl] is prescribed to decrease the dizziness. Antivert works by suppressing the information that goes from the inner ear to the brain. This medicine may be used in an acute stage to help with dizziness, but should not be used for long periods of time. If taken for long periods of time antivert can weaken the vestibular system and prolong recovery.

Karen Humphrey, BS, MPT, Certified in Vestibular Rehabilitation
McLaren Rehab Center

