

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

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Fact Sheet

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What is BPPV?

Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) is an inner ear problem that causes short periods of vertigo when your head is moved in certain positions. It occurs most commonly when lying down, turning over in bed, and looking up. Even though you are still, you may feel like you are moving, or that the room is moving around you. You may also experience nausea, vomiting, sweating, and abnormal eye movements. If the vertigo occurs with double vision, difficulty speaking, a change in alertness, arm/leg weakness, or an inability to walk, you should contact your physician immediately

What causes BPPV?

BPPV occurs when small crystals of calcium carbonate, commonly referred to as rocks, in our inner ear break loose and fall into another area within the balance canals. The crystals may break loose for many reasons following an inner ear infection, fever, concussion, or whiplash injury. BPPV can also occur along with other diagnoses of the inner ear such as Meniere's disease, migraines; or, it has been suggested that it is part of the "normal" aging process.

How is BPPV treated?

Most people (about 85%) recover from specific neck maneuvers, performed by their physician or physical therapist, which are designed to move the crystals back into place. Research shows that the repositioning maneuver works on the first effort, 80-90% of the time. After the treatment is complete, you may feel nauseous, dizzy, or have more trouble balancing than before. This can last for several hours. Avoid dangerous activity and follow the instructions given to you by the physician.

What else should I do after treatment?

For several hours, you should not turn your head quickly or tilt your head far up (as if looking to the sky) or far down (as if bending down to tie your shoes, or picking something up from the floor). You can sleep that night in whatever position you choose. Starting the next day, you should continue your normal activity and move your head as normally as possible.

Can the dizziness come back?

Since we do not know the exact cause of BPPV, it is also not possible to know how to prevent it. Unfortunately, medication has not been proven effective but rather can cause more harm than benefit. If your BPPV does return, you should contact your physical therapist. The crystals may be in a different place, so your treatment may be different than before. You should never try to put the crystals back on your own unless instructed by your healthcare provider. Remember, BPPV is treatable and the maneuvers can greatly reduce your vertigo and other symptoms associated with BPPV.