

Space and Motion Sensitivity

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Fact Sheet

What is space and motion sensitivity?

People living with vestibular disorders may experience symptoms of disorientation in busy visual environments or in situations with moving visual patterns. These feelings are sometimes called visual vertigo, space and motion discomfort, or persistent postural-perceptual dizziness (3PD) by doctors. Supermarkets, large crowds, or even fence posts seen within a person's side vision can cause significant distress (dizziness, nausea, or even disorientation) in people with space and motion sensitivity. Children may not tolerate playing on playground equipment and busy environments, or may complain of upset stomachs when riding in a car. However, younger children may not 'complain' but rather avoid activities, appear 'cranky' or appear clumsy. Some scientists think that the sensations that you feel may be related to you relying on information from your eyes for your balance than your other senses (the feeling in your feet and information from your ears).

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What can be done about my space and motion symptoms?

Physical therapists often try several different things to help people with space and motion sensitivity. One type of treatment is called habituation therapy. Habituation treatment involves exposing you to more and more difficult sensations that bother you. This therapy will help you get used to the sensations, so you do not feel so bad. Habituation treatment is done very slowly so that you can still do your normal activities. If you are exposed to environments and conditions that are too hard for you, you will feel worse. This kind of treatment is usually supervised in a physical therapy clinic and is followed up by you in your home. In some people, moving lights around you as you sit or stand have resulted in improvements in function so there is some evidence that this is a possible treatment. Sometimes videos are used to simulate real places such as grocery stores

Some people have very bad symptoms or headaches and cannot tolerate these habituation exercises. When this happens, the physical therapist will contact your doctor to see if there is a medicine that can "calm down" your symptoms and then will resume your exercise program after you can tolerate the exercises.

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