



## **“The 12 Critical Questions Regarding Dizziness, Imbalance and Falling”**

**1. Are Dizziness, the Fear of Falling and Balance Disorders an unavoidable part of aging? Absolutely not!** Studies indicate that a tendency to fall or symptoms of dizziness in the elderly should not be dismissed as part of aging, but may be important signs of disease that may be cured or controlled...And the vestibular system (inner ear) should not be ruled out as a source of these symptoms.

### **2. What are some of the causes of Dizziness or Balance Problems?**

Viral infections, head colds, flu, meningitis, swimmers ear, sore throat and the insertion in the ear canal of foreign objects, as well as many other diseases can cause dizziness, imbalance and the fear of falling. Also, blows to the head or ear, loud noises, pressure changes such as blowing your nose, trying to squelch a sneeze, and many drugs and chemicals, including alcohol are known for causing dizziness and imbalance.

### **3. What are the 7 main categories of symptoms of Dizziness and Balance Disorders?**

Many of the symptoms experienced by people affected by dizziness and balance disorders can be obscure and frightening. This list can aid those who have been unable to make sense out of their seemingly abnormal sensations and symptoms.

- 1. Vision:** Objects appear to jump, reading and writing difficulty, lights glow, blurred vision and poor depth perception.
- 2. Hearing:** Hearing can fluctuate, be lost completely, ringing or buzzing, your ears may feel full.
- 3. Gastrointestinal:** Continual or intermittent nausea, a hangover-like feeling or seasick sensation.
- 4. Memory:** Poor memory, you may forget what you are talking about, confusion, grope for words.
- 5. Coordination:** Clumsiness, drop things, imbalance, muscle and joint pain, slurred speech.
- 6. Emotions:** Loss of self-reliance, self-confidence, anxiety, phobias, panic attacks, depression and fear of falling.
- 7. Other:** Headaches, discomfort caused by temperature changes, pressure changes, wind currents, fatigue, everyday tasks are exhausting, violent whirling sensations (vertigo) and vomiting.

### **4. What does it mean when we say “The Vestibular System?”**

The vestibular system is the balance system in the inner ear. It is a complex structure of fluid-filled tubes and chambers. Specialized nerve endings inside these structures detect the position and movement of the head and also detect the direction of gravity. The signals from the vestibular system make up a critically important part of the sensory information that the brain needs in order to help control balance in standing and walking, and also to control certain types of reflexive eye movements that make it possible to see clearly while walking and running.

### **5. Why are patients with Inner Ear Disorders often referred to Physical or Occupational Therapy?**

Often times, patients with inner ear disorders develop secondary symptoms that are usually associated with reduced activity levels. They include decreased strength, loss of range of motion, increased tension, particularly in the cervical and shoulder region, leading to muscle fatigue and headaches. Until recently, little was known about vestibular disorders and their treatment. Most physicians believed that dizziness and vertigo were simply a part of getting older, so they either informed their patients they had to live with it, or they sent them to a physical therapist that understood very little about the inner ear and vestibular disorders. Even today, too many physicians and health care providers tell their patients that they have to live with it, or just send them to a general physical therapy.

## **6. Have you ever had a thorough test of your Vestibular System (Inner Ear)?**

The inner ear and associated nerves and brain centers form a complex system that serves many functions and can be affected by a number of outside systems. It is estimated that a large percentage of adults over the age of 55 that are experiencing dizziness or imbalance issues have a vestibular disorder

## **7. Why do so many Doctors prescribe medication for their patients with Dizziness?**

Up until recently, it was one of the only treatment options physicians could offer. The most common approach to managing dizziness and balance problems is to administer medication designed to suppress vestibular function. However, many of the medications used for inner ear disorders have the disadvantage of potential habituation and sedating side effects that frequently limit the ability to perform useful activities.

## **8. What is Vestibular Rehabilitation?**

Vestibular Rehabilitation is an exercise approach to alleviating dizziness symptoms associated with the inner ear (vestibular system). Vestibular rehabilitation is a specialized form of treatment involving specific exercises designed to decrease dizziness, increase balance function and increase general activity levels.

## **9. Do most Physical and Occupational Therapy Centers have Vestibular Diagnostic Testing and Rehabilitation Experts on their staff?**

Unfortunately the answer is no...Until recently little was known regarding vestibular rehabilitation and less than 7% of all physical and occupational therapists in the Twin Cities and the United States have specialized vestibular or inner ear training or education. Be sure to ask your doctor or primary care provider if their therapy center has therapists that have training in vestibular (inner ear) disorders.

## **10. How will a Therapist assess my Problems?**

Diagnosing a patient, begins with assessing an inner ear problem and focusing on three major areas: 1) evaluation of the muscular-skeletal system 2) balance and gait assessment 3) vertigo assessment. The muscular-skeletal assessment includes general range of motion, strength and coordination testing. The balance and gait assessment includes completion of a test that allows comparison of the patient's level of balance in his or her age group. It also includes an assessment of balance while walking. Vertigo assessment begins with a dizziness questionnaire to determine the frequency and severity of dizziness symptoms, and to document lifestyle changes resulting from balance problems. The patient is then asked to move in and out of 21 different positions requiring head and trunk motion.

## **11. Does your Therapist or Clinic have Diagnostic Equipment?**

This is a critical question in regards to the diagnosis and treatment of your dizziness and balance problem. The eyes are closely linked to the ears, and they depend on each other for good balance. Head movements and other stimulation of the inner ear send signals to the muscles in the eyes, which generate eye movements. The measurement of these movements is critical in diagnosing most vestibular disorders. The old technology is ENG (electronystagmography). It is a test that measures a group of eye movements looking for signs of vestibular or neurological problems. During the ENG tests, your eye movements are recorded and analyzed via small electrodes on the skin around the eyes. The electrodes attach to your skin with an adhesive, much like a small bandage. During testing, the technician will ask you to name names, or do simple math. This is to keep your mind busy and alert during testing.

## **12. What is VENG and Why is it Important for Diagnosing Inner Ear Disorders?**

The VENG (Video electronystagmography) is a vast improvement over the old way of doing an ENG. The old ENG method includes using adhesives, which stick electrodes around your eye. With the VENG you simply wear a set of comfortable goggles, which block all outside light, while a miniature infrared video camera mounted in the goggles accurately records eye movements. While regular ENG's have done a good job analyzing vestibular disorders, the VENG is the next-generation of technology that is a direct measurement of eye movement, which makes for a much more accurate diagnosis of vestibular problems.