Vestibular rehabilitation exercises

This fact sheet provides information on vestibular rehabilitation exercises for people with dizziness and balance problems. Our fact sheets are designed as general introductions to each subject and are intended to be concise. Each person is affected differently by dizziness and balance problems and you should speak with your GP or specialist for individual advice.

You might be interested in reading our Dizziness and Balance Problems booklet for further information on the different causes of dizziness and the conditions that can be treated with vestibular rehabilitation exercises.

Please note that you should not attempt any of these exercises without first seeing a specialist or physiotherapist for a comprehensive assessment, advice and guidance. Your GP can refer you. Some of these exercises will not be suitable for everyone, and some are only suitable for certain conditions.

**Cawthorne-Cooksey Exercises**

The aims of the Cawthorne-Cooksey exercises include relaxing the neck and shoulder muscles, training the eyes to move independently of the head, practising good balance in everyday situations, practise the head movements that cause dizziness (to help the development of vestibular compensation), improving general co-ordination, and encouraging natural spontaneous movement.

You should be assessed for an individual exercise programme to ensure you are doing the appropriate exercises. You could ask if it is possible for a friend or relative to accompany you at the assessment. It can be helpful if someone else learns the exercises and helps you with them.

You will be given guidance on how many repetitions of each exercise to do and when to progress to the next set of exercises. As a general rule, you should build up gradually from one set of exercises to the next. You might find that your dizziness problems get worse for a few days after you start the exercises, but you should persevere with them.

**Vestibular compensation**

Vestibular compensation is a process that allows the brain to regain balance control and minimise dizziness symptoms when there is damage to, or an imbalance between, the right and left vestibular organs (balance organs) in the inner ear. Essentially, the brain copes with the disorientating signals coming from the inner ears by learning to rely more on alternative signals coming from the eyes, ankles, legs and neck to maintain balance.
Make sure that you are in a safe environment before you start any of the exercises to reduce the risk of injury.

The exercises might include the following:

1. In bed or sitting:
   
   A. Eye movements (move eyes slowly at first, then quickly)
      Up and down
      From side to side
      Focussing on finger moving from three feet to one foot away from face
   
   B. Head movements (move head slowly at first, then quickly; with eyes open, then closed)
      Bending forwards and backwards
      Turning from side to side

2. Sitting:
   
   A. Eye and head movements, as 1
   B. Shrug and circle shoulders
   C. Bend forward and pick up objects from the ground

3. Standing:
   
   A. Eye, head and shoulder movements, as 1 and 2
   B. Change from a sitting to a standing position with eyes open, then closed
   C. Throw a ball from hand to hand above eye level
   D. Throw a ball from hand to hand under the knees
   E. Change from a sitting to a standing position, turning around in between

4. Moving about:
   
   A. Walk across the room with eyes open, then closed
   B. Walk up and down a slope with eyes open, then closed
   C. Walk up and down steps with eyes open, then closed
   D. Throw and catch a ball
   E. Any game involving stooping, stretching and aiming (for example, bowls or skittles)

**Gaze stabilization exercises**

The aim of gaze stabilization exercises is to improve vision and the ability to focus on a stationary object while the head is moving.

Your therapist should assess you and say which exercises are suitable for you.

1. Look straight ahead and focus on a letter (for example, an E) held at eye level in front of you.
2. Move your head from side to side, staying focussed on the target letter. Build up the speed of your head movement. It is crucial that the letter stays in focus. If you get too dizzy, slow down.
3. Try to continue for up to one minute (the brain needs this time in order to adapt). Build up gradually to repeat three to five times a day.

You can also do this exercise with an up and down (nodding) movement.

Progressions with this exercise can include placing the target letter on a busy background and changing the position of your feet.
Canalith repositioning procedures (CRP)
The aim of Canalith repositioning procedures (CRP) is to treat people with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) by moving particles trapped in the posterior semicircular canal in the inner ear (labyrinth) causing dizziness.

CRP involves a series of head and upper body movements performed by a trained specialist health professional.

The two main CRP treatments are the Epley manoeuvre and the Semont (Semont-Liberatory) manoeuvre. It is important that these manoeuvres are only performed by a trained specialist to prevent the risk of neck and back injuries.

Brandt-Daroff exercises
Brandt-Daroff exercises are a CRP treatment for BPPV that can be performed at home without the supervision of a specialist.

1. Sit on the edge of the bed and turn your head 45 degrees to one side.
2. Quickly lie down on your opposite side (that is, to the left if you turned your head to the right, and vice versa) so that the back of your head behind your ear touches the bed.
3. Hold this position for about 30 seconds.
4. Return to the sitting position.
Repeat on the on the other side, alternating until you have completed six repetitions on each side.
Do you need more help or information?

We hope you found the information in our fact sheet useful. If there’s anything you are still unclear about, or if you’d like to ask a question, please feel free to contact our Brain and Spine Helpline.

The neuroscience nurses on our Helpline are available to talk things through with you - call free on 0808 808 1000 (weekday mornings) or email us at helpline@brainandspine.org.uk.

The Helpline covers all brain and spine conditions and can offer information and support on any medical or related social and emotional issues of concern.

Can you help maintain this service with a donation?

Our information services are free, but we rely heavily on donations in order to keep publications like this one, as well as our Helpline and website available to people affected by brain and spine conditions. Any amount you can spare, however small, will be very gratefully received - thank you.

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