



BetterSafe

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

Maintaining Balance

A LOOK AT BALANCE DISORDERS

A balance disorder is a condition that makes you feel unsteady or dizzy. If you are standing, sitting, or lying down, you might feel as if you are moving, spinning, or floating. If you are walking, you might suddenly feel as if you are tipping over.

Everyone has a dizzy spell now and then, but the term “dizziness” can mean different things to different people. For one person, dizziness might mean a fleeting feeling of faintness, while for another it could be an intense sensation of spinning (vertigo) that lasts a long time.

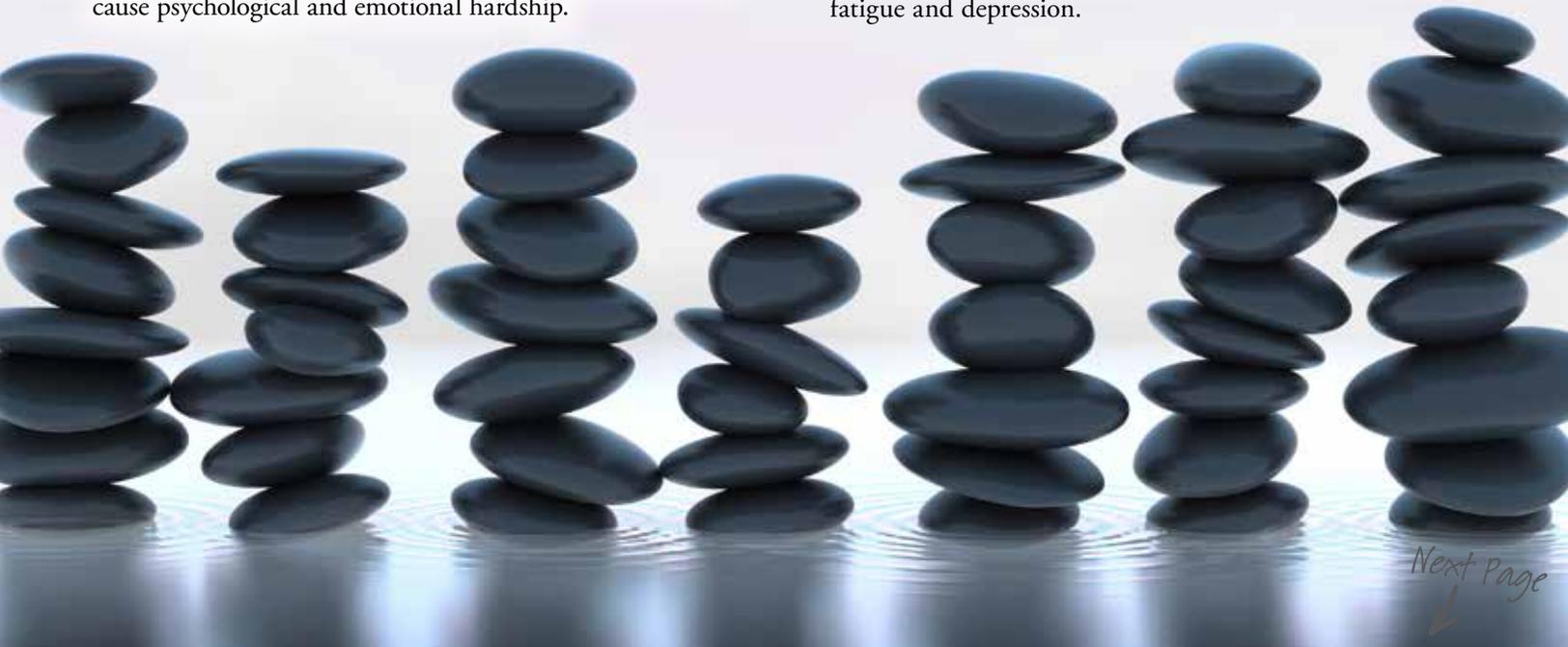
Experts believe that more than four out of 10 Americans, sometime in their lives, will experience an episode of dizziness significant enough to send them to a doctor. Balance disorders can be caused by certain health conditions, medications, or a problem in the inner ear or the brain. A balance disorder can profoundly impact daily activities and cause psychological and emotional hardship.

What Are The Symptoms Of A Balance Disorder?

If you have a balance disorder, you may stagger when you try to walk, or teeter or fall when you try to stand up. You might experience other symptoms such as:

- Dizziness or vertigo (a spinning sensation)
- Falling or feeling as if you are going to fall
- Lightheadedness, faintness, or a floating sensation
- Blurred vision
- Confusion or disorientation

Other symptoms might include nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, changes in heart rate and blood pressure, and fear, anxiety, or panic. Symptoms may come and go over short time periods or last for a long time, and can lead to fatigue and depression.



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What Causes Balance Disorders?

There are many causes of balance problems, such as medications, ear infections, a head injury, or anything else that affects the inner ear or brain. Low blood pressure can lead to dizziness when you stand up too quickly. Problems that affect the skeletal or visual systems, such as arthritis or eye muscle imbalance, can also cause balance disorders. Your risk of having balance problems increases as you get older.

Unfortunately, many balance disorders start suddenly and with no obvious cause.

How Does My Body Keep Its Balance?

Your sense of balance relies on a series of signals to the brain from several organs and structures in the body, which together are known as the vestibular system. The vestibular system begins with a maze-like structure in your inner ear called the labyrinth, which is made of bone and soft tissue.

How Are Balance Disorders Treated?

The first thing a doctor will do if you have a balance problem is determine if another health condition or a medication is to blame. If so, your doctor will treat the condition, suggest a different medication, or refer you to a specialist if the condition is outside his or her expertise.

When Should I Seek Help?

To help you decide whether to seek medical help for a dizzy spell, ask yourself the following questions. If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, talk to your doctor:

- Do I feel unsteady?
- Do I feel as if the room is spinning around me?
- Do I feel as if I'm moving when I know I'm sitting or standing still?
- Do I lose my balance and fall?
- Do I feel as if I'm falling?
- Do I feel lightheaded or as if I might faint?
- Do I have blurred vision?
- Do I ever feel disoriented—losing my sense of time or location?





Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

Do You Know Enough About Depression?

Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad. But these feelings are usually short-lived and pass within a couple of days. When you have depression, it interferes with daily life and causes pain for both you and those who care about you. Depression is a common but serious illness.

Many people with a depressive illness never seek treatment. But the majority, even those with the most severe depression, can get better with treatment. Medications, psychotherapies, and other methods can effectively treat people with depression.

There are several forms of depressive disorders.

Major Depression—severe symptoms that interfere with your ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy life. An episode can occur only once in a person's lifetime, but more often, a person has several episodes.

Persistent Depressive Disorder—depressed mood that lasts for at least two years. A person diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder may have episodes of major depression along with periods of less severe symptoms, but symptoms must last for two years.

Some forms of depression are slightly different, or they may develop under unique circumstances. They include:

- **Psychotic depression**, which occurs when a person has severe depression plus some form of psychosis, such as having disturbing false beliefs or a break with reality (delusions), or hearing or seeing upsetting things that others cannot hear or see (hallucinations).
- **Postpartum depression**, which is much more serious than the "baby blues" that many women experience after giving birth, when hormonal and physical changes and the new responsibility of caring for a newborn can be overwhelming. It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of women experience postpartum depression after giving birth.
- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**, which is characterized by the onset of depression during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight. The depression generally lifts during spring and summer. SAD may be effectively treated with light therapy, but nearly half of those with SAD do not get better with light therapy alone. Antidepressant medication and psychotherapy can reduce SAD symptoms, either alone or in combination with light therapy.



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Causes

Most likely, depression is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors.

Depressive illnesses are disorders of the brain. Brain-imaging technologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), have shown that the brains of people who have depression look different than those of people without depression. The parts of the brain involved in mood, thinking, sleep, appetite, and behavior appear different. But these images do not reveal why the depression has occurred. They also cannot be used to diagnose depression.

Some types of depression tend to run in families. However, depression can occur in people without family histories of depression too.

Signs & Symptoms

People with depressive illnesses do not all experience the same symptoms. The severity, frequency, and duration of symptoms vary depending on the individual and his or her particular illness.

Signs and symptoms include:

- ▶ Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings
- ▶ Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- ▶ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- ▶ Irritability, restlessness
- ▶ Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- ▶ Fatigue and decreased energy
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- ▶ Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- ▶ Overeating, or appetite loss
- ▶ Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- ▶ Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment

Treatments

Once diagnosed, a person with depression can be treated in several ways. The most common treatments are medication and psychotherapy.

How can I help a loved one who is depressed?

If you know someone who is depressed, it affects you too. The most important thing you can do is help your friend or relative get a diagnosis and treatment. You may need to make an appointment and go with him or her to see the doctor. Encourage your loved one to stay in treatment, or to seek different treatment if no improvement occurs after six to eight weeks.

To help your friend or relative:

- ▶ Offer emotional support, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
- ▶ Talk to him or her, and listen carefully.
- ▶ Never dismiss feelings, but point out realities and offer hope.
- ▶ Never ignore comments about suicide, and report them to your loved one's therapist or doctor.
- ▶ Invite your loved one out for walks, outings and other activities. Keep trying if he or she declines, but don't push him or her to take on too much too soon.
- ▶ Provide assistance in getting to the doctor's appointments.
- ▶ Remind your loved one that with time and treatment, the depression will lift.



TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

Parkinson's Disease

Understanding A Complicated Condition

We rely on our brains for every movement we make, whether writing, walking, talking, or even sleeping. But a serious brain disorder like Parkinson's disease can rob a person of the ability to do everyday tasks that many of us take for granted. There's no cure, but treatment can help. And researchers continue to seek new understanding to improve medical care.

Parkinson's disease evolves gradually over time. The early signs may be barely noticeable. A person's movements may change slightly. You might notice slowness, rigidity, or difficulty balancing or walking. The person's face may lack expression, or handwriting may become small and cramped. Eventually, these changes can become more severe and interfere with daily life. It might become harder to sleep, think, eat, speak, smell, and make decisions. As the disease worsens, symptoms may become difficult to control.

Parkinson's disease usually arises after age 50, but can also appear earlier in life. It affects about 600,000 people nationwide. As Americans age, the number of people with Parkinson's disease is expected to rise dramatically.

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder, which means that brain cells gradually malfunction and die. The disease damages brain cells that make a chemical called dopamine. The resulting dopamine shortage causes the movement problems that mark Parkinson's disease.

What We're Beginning To Understand

Although researchers don't yet understand what causes Parkinson's disease, the body's genes likely play some role. A number of genes have been linked to the risk of developing Parkinson's. "Diving deeper into the genetics of the disease is providing

us with hints about the underlying biology," says Dr. Beth-Anne Sieber, an NIH expert on Parkinson's disease.

But genes are only part of the picture. NIH-funded scientists are searching for other factors that might lead to the disease. One goal of this research is to discover new targets for drugs that can slow disease progression.

If you notice any of the common signs of Parkinson's disease, see a health care provider. Your doctor may refer you to a neurologist, a physician specializing in the nervous system. A careful exam and certain tests can help with diagnosis.



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TakeCharge

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To treat Parkinson's, doctors prescribe combinations of medicines that work to regulate dopamine in the brain. "This helps free up people to move better and lessens the troubling movement problems of Parkinson's," Sieber says.

A surgical procedure called deep brain stimulation is an option for some patients. In this approach, a small pacemaker-like system is placed in areas of the brain that control movement.

Research suggests that eating right and exercising may help reduce or delay symptoms. Scientists are studying how much and what kinds of exercise can most help improve patient health and quality of life.

Many potential new treatments for Parkinson's disease are now being studied in NIH-funded clinical trials. "There's a great need for people with Parkinson's and their families to participate in clinical research," says Sieber. "Participation is key."

KNOW THE SIGNS OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Parkinson's disease affects everyone differently. Common symptoms include:

- Movement problems such as shaking or tremor, especially in the fingers, hand, arm, or face
- Rigidity, stiffness, or slowness
- Fatigue or problems sleeping
- Problems standing or balancing
- Trouble speaking or choosing words
- Changes in handwriting
- Difficulty completing simple tasks or making decisions
- Inability to detect odors





ToYourHealth

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

COPD *Learn More Breathe Better*



Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious lung disease that over time, makes it hard to breathe. You may also have heard COPD called other names, like emphysema or chronic bronchitis. In people who have COPD, the airways—tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs—are partially blocked, which makes it hard to get the air out.

When COPD is severe, shortness of breath and other symptoms of COPD can get in the way of even the most basic tasks, such as doing light housework, taking a walk, even washing and dressing.

How Does COPD Affect Breathing?

The “airways” are the tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs through the nose and mouth. Healthy airways and air sacs in the lungs are elastic—they try to bounce back to their original shape after being stretched or filled with air, just the way a new rubber band or balloon does. This elastic quality helps retain the normal structure of the lung and helps to move the air quickly in and out.

What Are The Symptoms?

Many people with COPD avoid activities that they used to enjoy because they become short of breath more easily.

Symptoms of COPD include:

- ✓ Constant coughing, sometimes called “smoker’s cough”
- ✓ Shortness of breath while doing activities you used to be able to do
- ✓ Excess sputum production
- ✓ Feeling like you can’t breathe
- ✓ Not being able to take a deep breath
- ✓ Wheezing

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ToYourHealth

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When COPD is severe, shortness of breath and other symptoms can get in the way of doing even the most basic tasks, such as doing light housework, taking a walk, even bathing and getting dressed.

COPD develops slowly, and can worsen over time, so be sure to report any symptoms you might have to your doctor or health care provider as soon as possible, no matter how mild they may seem.

Getting Diagnosed

Everyone at risk for COPD who has cough, sputum production, or shortness of breath, should be tested for the disease. The test for COPD is called spirometry.

Spirometry can detect COPD before symptoms become severe. It is a simple, non-invasive breathing test that measures the amount of air a person can blow out of the lungs (volume) and how fast he or she can blow it out (flow). Based on this test, your doctor or health care provider can tell if you have COPD, and if so, how severe it is. The spirometry reading can help them to determine the best course of treatment.

TAKING ACTION

There are many things people at risk for COPD can do:

- Quit smoking
- Avoid exposure to pollutants
- Visit your doctor or health care provider on a regular basis
- Take precautions against seasonal flu

DID YOU KNOW?

- COPD is the 3rd leading cause of death in the United States and causes serious, long-term disability.
- COPD kills more than 120,000 Americans each year. That's one death every four minutes.
- More than 12 million people are diagnosed with COPD—An additional 12 million likely have COPD and don't even know it.



When COPD is severe, shortness of breath and other symptoms can get in the way of doing even the most basic tasks...