

Centre for Hearing and Balance Disorders (Audiology)

Balance - Vestibular Rehabilitation

Why is rehabilitation needed?

If the brain cannot rely on the information it receives from the vestibular system, a person's ability to maintain their balance can become overly dependent on vision, or on the information received from the muscles and joints (proprioception). This can lead to developing new patterns of movement to compensate for the change and to avoid head movements that increase their symptoms of dizziness and nausea.

For example, a person might restrict their neck movement to reduce the onset of their symptoms, and therefore might swivel their entire body rather than just the head in turning to look at something, or might always look down at the floor to avoid what appears as a confusing swirl of activity. Unfortunately, these types of adaptation can result in headache, neck ache, muscle stiffness, general fatigue, and a decrease in the ability to retrain the brain to adjust to the vestibular problem, which can make the symptoms much worse.

The aim of vestibular rehabilitation is to retrain the brain to recognise and process signals from the vestibular system in coordination with information from vision and proprioception. This often involves desensitising the balance system to movements that cause symptoms.

What happens during vestibular rehabilitation?

A qualified audiologist provides a course of exercises after a full assessment of the patient's balance; this includes observing posture,



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balance, movement and compensatory strategies.

From this assessment the audiologist will develop an individualised treatment plan that will include exercises to be performed both in the department and at home which combine specific head and body movements with eye exercises. Treatment may also include increasing activities and exercise in order to strengthen muscles and increase tolerance for certain stimuli. Some of the exercise and activities may at first cause an increase in symptoms, as the body and brain attempt to sort out the new pattern of movements. But with time and consistent work, the coordination signals from the eyes, proprioception, and vestibular system will occur.

How does rehabilitation help?

In most cases, balance improves if the exercises are correctly and accurately performed. Muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue will lessen, and symptoms of dizziness, vertigo, and nausea will decrease or disappear. Often, vestibular rehabilitation is so successful that no other treatment is required.

Further Information

This information is based on information from the Vestibular Disorders Association:

<http://vestibular.org/understanding-vestibular-disorder/treatment/treatment-detail-page>

If you have any further questions regarding this appointment please feel free to telephone Ann-Marie Hawkins or Bernadette Parker on 024 7696 6444.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6444 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

Patient Information

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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