

BENIGN PAROXYSMAL POSITIONAL VERTIGO (BPPV)

What is BPPV?

It is a condition of the inner ear characterised by vertigo which is triggered by specific changes in the position of the head. Small crystals(otoliths) are found embedded within the delicate sensory hairs within the inner ear. These small hairs help the inner ear with creating a sense of balance. Sometimes, these small crystals can break loose. These otoliths then brush against other nearby hairs, causing a sensation of vertigo.

Why these crystals break loose is unknown. Older patients (over 40 years old), previous head injury, surgery involving the skull, and migraines are thought to be risk factors for developing BPPV.

What are the symptoms of BPPV?

- Sensation of spinning caused by head movement or rolling over in bed
- Maybe accompanied with nausea, vomiting, sweating or feeling unwell
- Lasts for several seconds up to a minute
- May have a feeling of being off balance between spinning episodes

How is BPPV diagnosed?

BPPV is diagnosed with the help of history and a thorough clinical examination. A Videonystagmography (VNG) is done to confirm the diagnosis. A head CT or MRI maybe ordered to rule out other causes of dizziness.

How is BPPV treated?

Although distressing at first, most episodes of BPPV are self limited. The crystals eventually find their way out of the inner ear. This can be helped with home exercises or physiotherapy.

It is important not to put yourself in situations where you could hurt yourself or others by being dizzy. Be aware of your surroundings and what activities might put you at risk for a fall.

Physiotherapy: Special exercises are shown to you by the vestibular physiotherapist. These movements are designed to work with your inner ear to let the crystals float out of your inner ear. Usually, only a few sessions are needed to help.

If you are unable to access physiotherapy services, a home maneuver can be tried.