

Balance problems-Exercises

Balance problems and Vertigo can often be helped by rehabilitation exercises.

BPPV or Benign Paroxysmal Position Vertigo can be helped by Epley particle repositioning maneuvers. Search the internet for youtube videos of how to do these or see your doctor or specialist

Rehabilitation of a damaged balance system takes time. The brain has to relearn the interpretation of the signals coming from the eyes and the inner ear balance system. This happens quicker in the young and is helped by good or corrected vision and good illumination.

In order for this rehabilitation to occur the brain needs to be repetitively tested or stressed. This will often require exercising to the point where mild nausea and vertigo are appreciated.

Cawthorne-Cooksey modified exercises are a series of exercises to retrain a damaged balanced system

These exercises were used to help rehabilitate patients after labyrinthectomy operations. A labyrinthectomy is the deliberate destruction of the inner ear. It nearly always causes severe vertigo. The idea behind the exercises is a graded series of steps to help the brain compensate, or work around, the false information coming from the labyrinthectomised ear. The lack of any signal from one side, with normal signal from the other, is interpreted as a severe rotation. The brain has to re-programme itself to allow for, offset, and adapt to this defective signal. The exercises start with simple eye movements, and progress to complex activities.

- You should aim to spend about an hour a day doing the exercises.
- Start with the simple, easy ones and work up to the more difficult.
- It is better to split the time up into short sessions of five to ten minutes each.

- Some of the exercises can easily fit in with your normal activities.
- The more time and effort you put in, the quicker you will see some improvement.
- You will find that some of the exercises make you feel dizzy and sick. Don't worry, they are meant to, that is how they work.
- By working through the vertigo, you are training the brain to compensate for the faulty signal from the defective inner ear.
- You should concentrate and spend extra time on any of the exercises you find difficult – there's no gain without pain.
- But don't overdo it to the extent that you vomit – that might put you off doing any more.
- You don't need to go to the gym for any of the eye, head, sitting or standing exercises, but you might prefer to do so for those involving moving about.

Eye exercises

- Look up and down 20 times. Start slowly at first, then speed up.
- Look from one side to the other 20 times. Start slowly at first, then speed up.
- Hold up one finger at arm's length. Focus on it. Move it slowly in towards you and out again 20 times.

Head exercises

- With your eyes open, bend your head forwards, then backwards, 20 times. Start slowly at first, then speed up.
- With your eyes open, turn your head from side to side 20 times. Start slowly at first, then speed up.
- As the dizziness improves, repeat the head exercises with your eyes closed.

Sitting exercises

- Shrug your shoulders 20 times.
- Turn your shoulders to the right and left 20 times.
- From the sitting position, bend down and pick up objects from the floor, and sit back up again. Repeat 20 times.

Standing exercises

- Move from sitting to standing up, and back again, with your eyes open, 20 times.
- Repeat with eyes closed.
- Throw a small ball from one hand to the other, above eye level,

20 times.

- Throw the ball from hand to hand at knee level, 20 times.
- Turn around 360 degrees on the spot, eyes open.
- Repeat with eyes closed.
- As vertigo lessens, speed up.

Moving about exercises (special caution advised)

- Walk across the floor with your eyes open 20 times.
- Repeat with eyes closed.
- Walk up and down a slope with your eyes open 20 times.
- Repeat with eyes closed.
- Walk up and down steps 20 times with your eyes open.
- Repeat with eyes closed.
- Any game or exercise that involves stooping, turning, bending, stretching and hand-eye coordination – for example bowling, tennis – is good for improving your balance.

Tips to avoid injury during recovery

Some patients will take up to a year to make a proper recovery. Even after that, there may be situations where central compensation breaks down. The commonest situations where you may get a recurrence of vertigo symptoms are:

- Sudden rapid movements
- In the dark
- On soft or uneven ground
- Under the influence of sedative drugs or alcohol
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What you should do is

- Make sure you do the exercises regularly, at least an hour a day, broken up into short sessions.
- Build up your confidence by achieving improvements with the exercises.
- Take a walking stick with you when you go out in public – it will amplify proprioception (positional sense). Wear sensible shoes – flat soles with good grips, don't ask for trouble by tottering along on high heels.
- Make sure your spectacle prescription is up to date and your lenses are clean. Bifocals and varifocals can cause difficulties, it is probably better to have separate distance and reading glasses during recovery. Good vision helps balance.
- Leave a night light on in the bedroom, light the way to the

bathroom. If you have to get up in the night, that is a common time to have problems