

Symptoms

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A VESTIBULAR DISORDER?

The vestibular system includes the parts of the inner ear and brain that help control balance and eye movements. If the system is damaged by disease, aging, or injury, vestibular disorders can result, and are often associated with one or more of these symptoms, among others:

- ▶ **Vertigo and dizziness**
- ▶ **Imbalance and spatial disorientation**
- ▶ **Vision disturbance**
- ▶ **Hearing changes**
- ▶ **Cognitive and/or psychological changes**
- ▶ **Other symptoms**

Not all symptoms will be experienced by every person with an inner ear disorder, and other symptoms are possible. An inner ear disorder may be present even in the absence of obvious or severe symptoms. It is important to note that most of these individual symptoms can also be caused by other unrelated conditions.

The type and severity of symptoms can vary considerably, and be frightening and difficult to describe. People affected by certain symptoms of vestibular disorders may be perceived as inattentive, lazy, overly anxious, or seeking attention. They may have trouble reading or doing simple arithmetic. Functioning in the workplace, going to school, performing routine daily tasks, or just getting out of bed in the morning may be difficult for some people.

VERTIGO AND DIZZINESS

- ▶ Spinning or whirling sensation; an illusion of movement of self or the world (vertigo)
- ▶ Lightheaded, floating, or rocking sensation (dizziness)
- ▶ Sensation of being heavily weighted or pulled in one direction

BALANCE AND SPATIAL ORIENTATION

- ▶ Imbalance, stumbling, difficulty walking straight or turning a corner
- ▶ Clumsiness or difficulty with coordination
- ▶ Difficulty maintaining straight posture; tendency to look downward to confirm the location of the ground
- ▶ Head may be held in a tilted position
- ▶ Tendency to touch or hold onto something when standing, or to touch or hold the head while seated
- ▶ Sensitivity to changes in walking surfaces or footwear
- ▶ Muscle and joint pain (due to struggling with balance)
- ▶ Difficulty finding stability in crowds or in large open spaces

VISION

- ▶ Trouble focusing or tracking objects with the eyes; objects or words on a page seem to jump, bounce, float, or blur or may appear doubled
- ▶ Discomfort from busy visual environments such as traffic, crowds, stores, and patterns
- ▶ Sensitivity to light, glare, and moving or flickering lights; fluorescent lights may be especially troublesome
- ▶ **Sensitivity to certain types of computer monitors and digital televisions**
- ▶ Tendency to focus on nearby objects; increased discomfort when focusing at a distance
- ▶ Increased night blindness; difficulty walking in the dark
- ▶ Poor depth perception

Visit the [Neuro-Optometric Association's website](#) for more information about balance and the illusions of eye movement.

HEARING CHANGES

- ▶ Hearing loss; distorted or fluctuating hearing

▶ **Tinnitus (ringing, roaring, buzzing, whooshing, or other noises in the ear)**

- ▶ Sensitivity to loud noises or environments
- ▶ Sudden loud sounds may increase symptoms of vertigo, dizziness, or imbalance

COGNITIVE

- ▶ Difficulty concentrating and paying attention; easily distracted
- ▶ Forgetfulness and short-term memory lapses
- ▶ Confusion, disorientation, difficulty comprehending directions or instructions
- ▶ Difficulty following speakers in conversations, meetings, etc., especially when there is background noise or movement
- ▶ Mental and/or physical fatigue out of proportion to activity

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- ▶ Loss of self-reliance, self-confidence, self-esteem
- ▶ Anxiety, panic, social isolation
- ▶ Depression

OTHER

- ▶ Nausea or vomiting
- ▶ "Hangover" or "seasick" feeling in the head
- ▶ Motion sickness
- ▶ Sensation of fullness in the ears
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Slurred speech
- ▶ Sensitivity to pressure or temperature changes and wind currents
- ▶ Pain, pressure, or other symptoms with certain dietary changes (e.g., high sodium)

DID THIS INFORMATION HELP YOU?

Thanks to VEDA, vestibular disorders are becoming recognized for their impacts on people's lives and our economy. We see new diagnostic tools and research studies, more accessible treatments, and a growing respect for how life-changing vestibular disorders can be.

Your support of VEDA matters. Please help us continue this important work by becoming a [member](#) or [donor](#).

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