



# VESTIBULAR DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### ONE-THIRD OF ALL US ADULTS HAVE VESTIBULAR DYSFUNCTION: ANNUAL BALANCE SCREENING IS ESSENTIAL

**PORTLAND, OR, September 9, 2009** – Illness, injury, and even aging can damage the fragile vestibular organs of the inner ear, and with them, the ability to balance—not just physically, but the demands of work and independent living. An estimated 69 million US adults aged 40 and over—35% of all Americans—experience vestibular system dysfunction. In celebration of its thirteenth annual Balance Awareness Week spanning September 20–26, the Vestibular Disorders Association (VEDA) is promoting balance screening as a standard part of an annual health check-up.

“We’re used to seeing the doctor for yearly screenings for cancer or heart disease, but are seldom screened for healthy balance,” said Lisa Haven, PhD, executive director of VEDA.

The vestibular system is the body’s navigator, orienting it in space. Imbalance from a vestibular disorder can result in catastrophic outcomes such as falls, a leading cause of death among older individuals. In the US alone, patient care costs for vestibular disorder-related falls total more than \$8 billion per year.

In addition to affecting balance, vestibular disorders often produce accompanying disabling symptoms that include vertigo, dizziness, hearing and vision problems, and difficulty concentrating. These life-altering symptoms can deeply inhibit basic day-to-day functioning. For example, 33.4% of those with chronic imbalance are unable to perform one or more activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, eating, or simply getting in and out of bed without assistance. These challenges are compounded by how invisible vestibular disorders are to other people, who often find it difficult to understand that a person with vestibular dysfunction is profoundly struggling to remain oriented and functional.

Routine balance screening can help identify underlying problems such as vestibular disorders. “Many people with vestibular disorders spend years suffering from debilitating symptoms before receiving a diagnosis,” said Gaye W. Cronin, OTD, OTR, an occupational therapist at the Atlanta Ear Clinic and member of VEDA’s Board of Directors. “The more frequently people receive balance screening, the earlier they can get diagnosed and seek treatment such as vestibular rehabilitation therapy.” Vestibular rehabilitation is a special form of physical therapy involving exercises designed to coordinate eye and head movements, desensitize the vestibular system, improve balance and walking ability, fitness, and endurance.

“Everyone—most especially those aged 40 and over—should talk about balance screening with a doctor,” said Ms. Haven. “Good balance is essential to good physical and economic health.”

For Balance Awareness Week 2009, VEDA invites volunteers across the US and world to participate by promoting activities such as offering balance screenings in clinics and health fairs, blogging with information available from VEDA about balance disorders, organizing community-education forums, and acknowledging physicians and other healthcare providers for their dedicated work.

**About VEDA:** For over 25 years, the Vestibular Disorders Association has provided objective information and a caring support network to people with vestibular disorders and the health professionals who treat them. For more information, visit [www.vestibular.org](http://www.vestibular.org) or call (800) 837-8428.

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