



# VESTIBULAR DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### VISUAL-VESTIBULAR CONFLICT DURING “AVATAR” MAY TRIGGER INTENSE DIZZINESS AND VERTIGO

**PORTLAND, OR, February 4, 2010**—Thanks to the worldwide and box office record-breaking popularity of “Avatar,” more people are discovering that viewing 3-D films can have unexpected side effects: intense nausea, dizziness, and vertigo. These symptoms sometimes result from general problems with vision, but also from a far less well known cause—visual-vestibular conflict.

According to Executive Director Lisa Haven, PhD, of the Vestibular Disorders Association (VEDA, <http://www.vestibular.org>), the vestibular organs of the inner ear provide the brain with information about where the body is in physical space, signaling whether the self or the environment is in motion.

Films using 3-D technology such as “Avatar” are made by recording and projecting separate images for each eye to create an illusion of greater depth and movement. This illusion conflicts with information from the vestibular organs, which signal that the body is still. When the brain attempts to resolve the contradiction, distressing symptoms may result.

These symptoms manifest even more severely if a viewer already has a disorder of the vestibular system. An estimated 69 million US adults—35% of all Americans aged 40 and over—experience vestibular system dysfunction. Dr. Haven notes that “Broad-based demographic studies consistently show that vestibular disorders are underdiagnosed and undertreated. Viewers who experience distressing symptoms during “Avatar” may be experiencing a passing moment of visual-vestibular conflict—but if the reaction is strong and symptoms persist, consulting an expert in vestibular disorders for an evaluation makes good sense.”

For those who want to see “Avatar” but already know that they have a vestibular disorder, or for those who are prone to motion sickness or simply have a temporary illness affecting their ears, Dr. Haven advises choosing a theater showing a traditional screening over the 3-D viewing option.

For those not currently experiencing inner ear problems and who intend to see the film in full 3-D glory, Dr. Haven still suggests sitting back as far in the theater as possible—because the larger the 3-D image in the visual field, the more likely it is that visual-vestibular conflict will occur. If distressing symptoms occur, it’s imperative to rest and allow them to pass and seek out assistance, especially if driving. “Driving during a vertigo attack is dangerous,” said Dr. Haven. “If you get sick during “Avatar,” get immediate help—and consider following up later with a vestibular disorders specialist.”

**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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