



VESTIBULAR

DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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Recommendations for Starting a Support Group

By Claire Haddad, Boston Area Support Group Leader

I have been running a vestibular support group in the Boston area for nearly 10 years and I can offer the following advice to people who are looking to start their own support group:

- **Location:** Choose a central location for your support group, preferably a location that doesn't charge for the meeting room. Do you know of any local physicians/physical therapists that specialize in vestibular disorders who may want to give you free meeting space one day or evening/month? If possible, survey people as to when they would likely meet.
- **Advertise:** Run a free ad in the community section of the local paper before you form the group to gauge the interest. Once the group starts to meet continue to advertise (for free) upcoming meetings in the local paper, on Craigslist, on Meetup.com, and through other local social networks. You can list your support group meeting dates on VEDA's support group calendar (email to info@vestibular.org).
- **Promote:** Write letters to ENTs and other specialists in your area and include a simple flyer that they can post in their waiting room or make available to patients with your contact information. Repeat periodically so that they know your group is still active.
- **Facebook:** Post a message on the VEDA's Facebook page about starting a support group and ask interested people to email you.
- **Seasonal Scheduling:** Consider not meeting in the summer. People tend to be more active in the summer, taking vacations and attending more outdoor social events, which could reduce your turnout. You may also consider not scheduling meetings in January or near the end of the year holidays.
- **Frequency:** Sometimes it's better to meet less frequently, with a focus on having high-quality meetings. Meeting 4 -6 times per year may be better to begin the group.
- **Communication:** Send a standard "welcome" email to all who inquire about the group. Send reminder emails to your group members one week before the meeting with the discussion topic.
- **Topics:** Consider setting a topic for discussion for each meeting. Of course, tangents will develop, but a topic for discussion will allow people to choose in advance if it's of interest to them.
- **Guest speakers:** Consider inviting guest speakers to the group from time to time. Many professionals are happy to speak to your group as it could



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benefit their practice by promoting referrals. Here are some suggestions for professionals you may want to invite to speak at one of your meetings: psychologists, physical therapists, acupuncturists, Reiki practitioners, chiropractors, disability lawyers, neurologists, and social workers (i.e. to discuss anxiety).