



Maximizing the Office Visit

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If you're like many vestibular patients (and patients in general) you may find that you have limited time during your office visit to speak with your doctor, and for one reason or another you forget to mention something important or simply run out of time. Here are some hints to help you prepare for an office visit with your doctor to get the most out of the time you spend with him or her.

I. Medical History: Take your medical history with you to your initial office visit, summarized on a note card.

Initial Symptoms:

- Prior to experiencing a balance problem, did you have the flu, a virus, or an accident (e.g. car accident)? If so, how long did this condition last? How much time after this condition did the symptoms of the balance problem become evident?
- Describe the initial symptoms of the balance problem. Did the dizziness increase over time? Did you begin to experience vertigo (spinning) attacks? Do your symptoms change when you change position (e.g. roll to one side in bed)?

How do you describe your symptoms? Be specific.

- constant rocking motion, like being on a boat
- lightheadedness (as if you might faint)
- spinning attacks (true vertigo)
- unsteady gait or the need to hold onto walls
- your head feels "full" or very heavy; headaches and/or migraines?
- nausea/vomiting accompanying your balance problem
- dizziness/vertigo getting out of bed or with head movements

Be careful in distinguishing between dizziness and vertigo. Using these terms incorrectly can lead to misdiagnosis. Read the definitions to decide if either can describe your symptoms.

- Dizziness: lightheaded, floating, or rocking sensation.
- Vertigo: a spinning or whirling sensation; an illusion of movement of yourself or your environment.

Is your hearing affected?



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- Does your hearing fluctuate?
- Do you hear “ringing in your ears” (tinnitus)? When? How often?

Is your vision affected?

- Do you have double vision or fuzzy vision?
- Do bright lights bother you?
- Do images jump when you look at them or turn your head?
- Do you feel that you can’t look up or down or side to side without feeling as though you are falling forward/backward or creating a sensation of movement?
- Are your symptoms triggered or exacerbated in places with lots of visual stimulation such as the supermarket, the shopping mall, and places with patterned carpets, venetian blinds, fluorescent lights, etc.

II. Keep a Diary Prior to the Office Visit

Frequency of Dizziness

- How often do you have dizziness or other symptoms of a balance problem?
- Do you feel dizzy or have a vertigo attack after eating certain foods that contain high levels of salt, alcohol or caffeine?
- How do weather systems affect your symptoms?
- Have you ever fallen? If so, when, where and how often?

Medications

- What medications are you taking? Remember to include all over-the-counter medications, including antihistamines and sleep aids.
- Do you take any supplements beyond a multi-vitamin, such as St. John’s Wort, Ginko Biloba, etc.?

Other medical conditions

- Do you have another medical condition(s)? If so, do you take any medication for this condition?

III. The Office Visit

- If you need support, bring a family member or friend with you to take notes and/or ask questions on your behalf with the medical professional.
- Read your medical history to the medical professional. Offer a copy of your written summary. He or she may still prefer to take notes rather than accepting your written summary.
- Ask your medical professional at the end of the exam to forward a copy of his/her report once it is available to other medical professionals (e.g. your general practitioner) and a copy to you to keep for your records.