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CREATE A PLAN

Having a plan in place can help ensure that you are ready if and when a vertigo attack begins

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How to Deal with an Acute Vertigo Episode

By Joon Nah, BScPT

Vertigo can be an extremely distressing symptom. The sudden onset of world-turning dizziness and the accompanying nausea, imbalance and loss of function can feel paralyzing and cause great concern. You're not alone. In fact, nearly 40% of adults in the U.S. will experience vertigo at some point in their lives.

Fortunately, most attacks are not due to serious medical conditions. And there is help available to understand why these symptoms occur and how to improve your condition.

Here are some tips to help you deal with vertigo, when it happens.



SEEK MEDICAL HELP

Get to an Acute Care Center or the Emergency Department for the following:

- If this is the first time you've experienced a vertigo attack
- If your symptoms of vertigo, nausea, vomiting are worsening
- If you have trouble with any of the following:
 - Speaking or swallowing
 - Double vision or loss of vision
 - Loss of coordination of your hands, fingers, feet
 - Weakness or loss of sensation in one or more of your limbs
 - Severe headache that is not typical to you.

If your attack is similar to a previous one, then you'll likely benefit from seeing your family doctor or a vestibular rehabilitation professional, such as a vestibular physical therapist.



GET TO A SAFE PLACE

Vertigo episodes can result in problems with vision and balance, and cause you to feel disoriented. Your personal safety is top priority.

- Move away from roads, unstable ground, and nearby obstacles.
- Move slowly keeping your head straight and walk near walls and hand rails
- Focus on a spot in front of you
- Sit or lie down. If lying, elevate your head with an extra pillow.
- Find a quiet, dark place. Use ear plugs or headphones if you need to and close your eyes.

MEDICATIONS

Some medications can help by acting as antihistamines and vestibular suppressants, which can calm down the overactive balance centers in your inner ear. Your doctor may suggest meclizine, dimenhydrinate, Betahistine, scopolamine, and other similar drugs.

If you can feel signs that a vertigo attack is coming on, taking these preventatively can give you even greater control over your dizziness episode. Remember, these medications are only intended for short-term use.

REDUCING YOUR NAUSEA

Nausea is often the most disabling symptom of a vertigo attack. The following are common aids to reduce nausea and improve your tolerance to dizziness.

- Ginger and peppermint (tea, capsules, dietary)
- Essentials oils (applied to points on the body or using with a diffuser)
- Inhale alcohol prep pads or wipes
- Acupressure applied to your forearm, an inch away from your wrist (or by using motion sickness bands)
- Cannabidiol (CBD), usually taken as oil drops or edibles. Warning: products with active THC can actually increase dizziness, further worsening nausea.
- Stay hydrated with lots of fluids

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Acute vertigo is usually caused by hyperactivity

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH VERTIGO

SEEK MEDICAL HELP

GET TO A SAFE PLACE

TAKE MEDICATION

REDUCE NAUSEA

PRACTICE RELAXATION

AVOID TRIGGERS

CREATE A PLAN

issues with your brain's balance sensing system. Relaxation strategies can directly calm these areas down, reducing your overall dizziness.

- Understanding that vertigo is usually not a serious condition can help reduce anxiety
- Practice slow and deep breathing
- Learn to meditate using online resources, smartphone/tablet apps, or by contacting a therapist such as a social worker or psychologist

AVOID OR REDUCE TRIGGERS

The following are common triggers that can provoke dizziness, particularly in the midst of an attack. Be mindful of them, and avoid when possible.

- Decrease alcohol, caffeine and tobacco use
- Reduce your salt intake
- Keep your blood sugar level stable. Try to eat small meals and often. Avoid high sugar foods and drinks that can spike your insulin levels.
- Avoid situations or activities that cause you to feel stress
- Try to limit the specific movements and activities that directly increase your dizziness until your symptoms have settled past the initial, acute stage



CREATE A PLAN

If you suffer from repeated episodes of acute vertigo, your best defense is preparation. An attack can make you feel confused and disoriented, and they typically don't occur on a schedule. So have a plan prepared and ready to go.

1. Have your medications and aids (anti-nausea pills, dizziness suppressants, seasickness bands etc.) nearby in your purse, desk or car.
2. Keep your medical ID with you.
3. Keep a short list of people you can call if you have an attack. Mark them as "favorites" on your phone's contact list.
4. Most importantly, don't keep your dizziness condition a secret. Let friends, family and co-workers know that you experience potential vertigo attacks. Help them understand how you may react and in what ways they can assist you.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

If vertigo is new to you, avoid end-range head movements (e.g. looking all the way up and turning your head as far as it can go). In some rare circumstances, vertigo can be caused by blood flow issues in your neck.

As the acute phase of your condition subsides, the best advice for reducing your symptoms can differ significantly from what is outlined here. Find a health professional that understands dizziness and get help. Search for a vestibular specialist using VeDA's Healthcare Directory here: <https://vestibular.org/healthcare-directory/>

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