

# PATIENT'S GUIDE TO EVALUATING VESTIBULAR PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

There is strong evidence supporting vestibular physical therapy for reducing symptoms, improving gaze and postural stability, and improving function in individuals with vestibular dysfunction. Choosing a qualified physical therapist (PT) can help ensure positive outcomes. Here are some tips for evaluating the qualifications of your PT.

## TRAINING

Do they have substantial post-graduate training in vestibular rehabilitation (beyond a 2-day weekend introductory course)?

## CLINICAL PRACTICE

1. Does their practice focus on vestibular patients?
2. Are they a part of a multi-disciplinary team of vestibular specialists that includes an audiologist, neurotologist, and psychologist?
3. Do they follow the clinical practice guidelines for BPPV and Vestibular Hypofunction?

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Are they a member of an accredited physical therapy association identified as having a special interest in vestibular disorders (e.g. American Physical Therapy Association/Academy of Neurological Physical Therapy/Vestibular Special Interest Group)?

## INITIAL VISIT

Is the length of your initial visit at least one-hour? Do they provide you with one-on-one treatment (i.e. they are not treating several patients in the same or different rooms concurrently)?

## PERSONAL STYLE

Do you feel like this person genuinely cares about your well-being? Are they empathetic to the impact your vestibular symptoms have had on your daily life? Are they committed to helping you find a diagnosis, whether it is through their own practice or by referring you to another specialist?

## EXPERIENCE

How long has the therapist been working primarily with vestibular patients?

## A COMPLETE EXAM SHOULD INCLUDE:

1. History: They should ask questions about the timing of your symptoms, activities that make your dizziness better or worse, and your previous dizziness history and treatment. They should give you a questionnaire to rate your dizziness symptoms, such as the Dizziness Handicap Inventory.
2. Ocular motor (eye movement) exam: They should look at your eye movements and tie the findings to possible diagnoses.
3. Walking and balance: They should perform standardized tests to measure your walking and balance abilities. Commonly used measures include the Functional Gait Assessment, Dynamic Gait Index, and/or 10-meter walk test.

## EQUIPMENT

Do they have a way to evaluate eye movements with visual fixation prevented (e.g. infrared goggles or Frenzel lenses)?



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