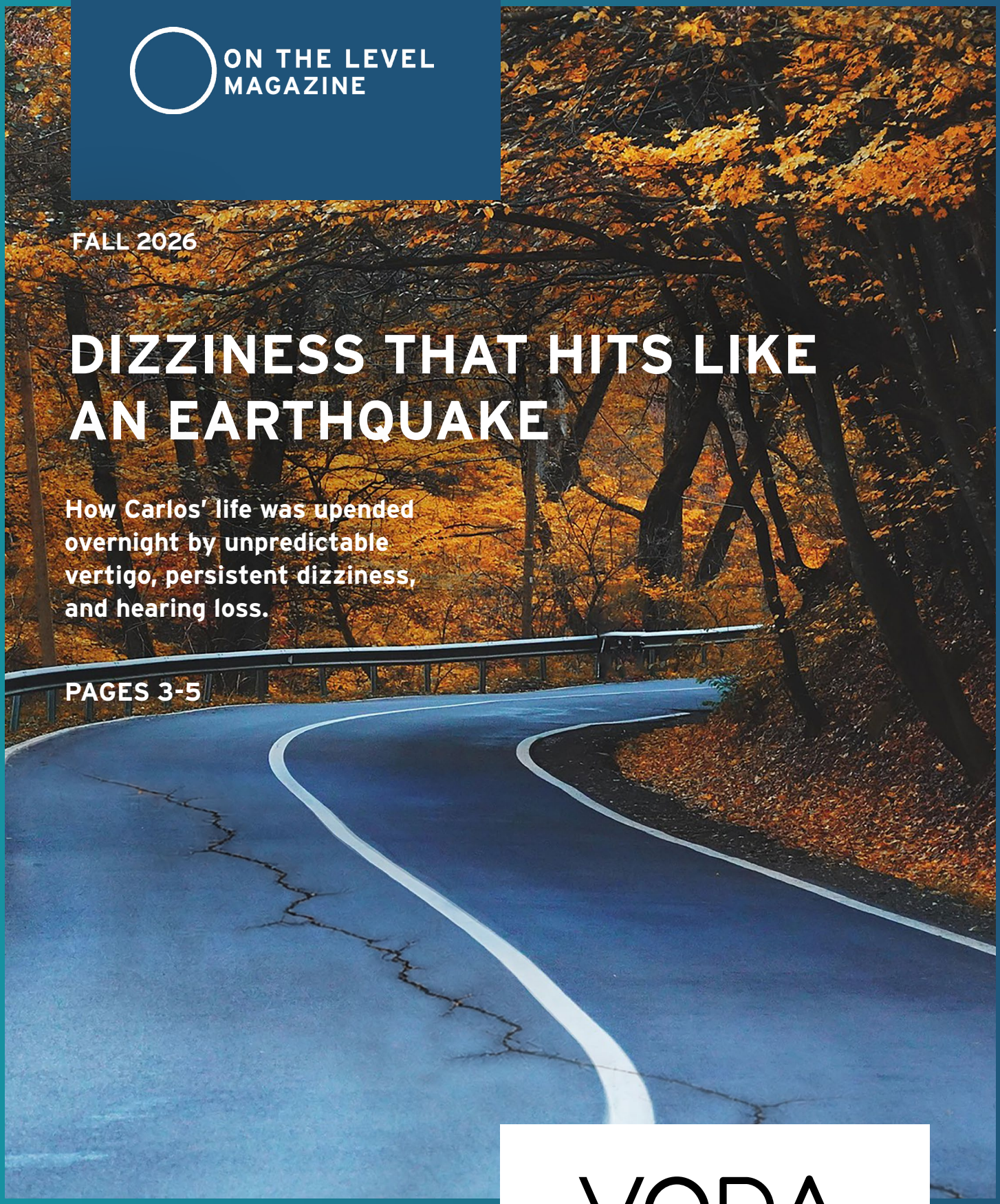
ON THE LEVEL MAGAZINE

FALL 2026

DIZZINESS THAT HITS LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE

How Carlos' life was upended overnight by unpredictable vertigo, persistent dizziness, and hearing loss.

PAGES 3-5



VEDA

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE VESTIBULAR DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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DIZZINESS THAT HITS LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE

CARLOS CORIA'S STORY



Like many people who now live with vestibular conditions, Carlos Coria felt like he was living a "normal life." He was busy with his career, his family, and the activities he enjoyed. Then, in early 2025, his health began to change, setting him on a vestibular journey he never expected to take.

"Before the onset of my symptoms, I was a full professor at UNC Charlotte, actively engaged in research, teaching, and academic life. And my personal life was vibrant and active. My wife and I loved attending musicals with our three children. I was also accustomed to walking at least two hours every day."

A NEW MYSTERY ILLNESS

"My condition began with severe, unpredictable episodes of vertigo, persistent dizziness, severe migraines, and a loss of balance."

The terrifying and unsettling new symptoms sent Carlos' life spinning. He didn't know what was happening to him, or why.

Carlos initially saw his family physician, followed by multiple ENT specialists and neurologists. But no matter what doctor he talked to, no one seemed to be able to help.

"I was prescribed numerous medications, none of which were effective; in fact, severe reactions to these medication cocktails resulted in two emergency room visits."

A LIFE BECAME SMALLER

Over time, Carlos' symptoms progressed to include significant hearing loss, leaving him 95% deaf.

And as his symptoms got worse, everyday life became more difficult.

"Because oral communication is extraordinarily difficult due to my hearing loss, I have had to step away from social interactions entirely. Simple, everyday conversations—whether with neighbors, shop clerks, or friends—are no longer possible for me. I can no



CARLOS' WIFE AND THREE SONS

longer talk on the phone or easily converse with my extended family, including my brothers and sisters, which has created a deep sense of isolation."

Carlos and his wife are rarely able to leave home, and basic movement has become a major challenge.

"My daily walks have been reduced from two hours to just 15 minutes."

The impact of his vestibular disorder reached nearly every part of his life. Carlos was forced to step down from his professorial duties long before he had planned to retire.

"Losing my active role in academia, my research, and my daily collaboration with university colleagues has been an immense loss."

Activities that once brought Carlos joy are no longer part of his routine.

"Traveling to academic conferences, dining out, going to movies, and staying physically active are no longer part of my routine."

He also lost the ability to drive. "The last time I drove a car was in January 2025."

AN EARTHQUAKE THAT SHATTERED HIS LIFE

Even without a diagnosis to name his illness, Carlos knows the enormous toll it has taken.

"Though I am still navigating the journey without a precise diagnostic title, the physical toll—dizziness, loss of balance, profound hearing loss, along with chronic back and leg pain—has been catastrophic."

He describes the experience in terms that capture how suddenly and completely his life changed.

"It felt like an earthquake that instantly shattered the foundation of my life and body. It is a reality I never could have anticipated facing."

REFUSING TO GIVE UP

Despite the exhaustion, pain, uncertainty, and frustration, Carlos has a message for others living through their own vestibular journeys.

"Please do not give up."

He knows the road can be difficult, but he encourages others to hold on to the possibility of better days ahead.

"VESTIBULAR ILLNESS CAN UPEND YOUR ENTIRE WORLD IN A MATTER OF DAYS"

"Though the road can be exhausting, painful, and filled with deep frustration, hold onto hope that you will reach a place of relief and peace."

"The pain of these difficult moments will eventually belong to the past, and you will find ways to experience joy in life once again."

NEW TREATMENTS AND NEW HOPE

Early in 2026, after over a year of suffering and searching fruitlessly for answers, Carlos finally found a team of healthcare providers who can help.

"Thanks to the interest in my case by Dr. Isaac David Smith, I transferred to Duke Hospital. While the medical team has not yet arrived at a definitive diagnosis, I am currently undergoing a treatment plan aimed at halting the progression of the illness and managing my symptoms."

WHY YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

You are receiving this magazine because you have supported VeDA with a charitable donation or Professional Membership dues, and Carlos' story is a reminder of why your support matters.

As Carlos explains, your continued support offers a lifeline to people just like him who are suffering from unexplained dizziness and imbalance

"Vestibular illness can upend your entire world in a matter of days. That's why VeDA is such an indispensable organization, doing crucial work with limited resources.

"Your support directly helps hundreds of patients and families navigate the daunting, complex reality of vestibular disorders when they need guidance the most. I encourage you to give as generously as you can."

You can **make a donation in honor of Carlos**, supporting all of VeDA's work, and renewing your subscription to this *On the Level* magazine at **vestibular.org/OTLdonate**.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Mild traumatic brain injury recovery: a qualitative study of noise sensitivity, vestibular issues, and anxiety interactions



A concussion is considered a "mild" traumatic brain injury (mTBI), but for some people, symptoms such as dizziness, imbalance, visual problems, noise sensitivity, fatigue, and anxiety can significantly affect daily life.

A recent study explored what these symptoms actually feel like for people recovering from mTBI, with particular interest in **vestibular problems**, **noise sensitivity**, and **anxiety or fear**.

WHAT THE RESEARCHERS FOUND

Researchers interviewed 14 adults in New Zealand approximately 8–12 months after their injuries. Half experienced a relatively short recovery, while the other half continued to have significant limitations six months after their injury.

Because this was a *qualitative* study, the goal was not to determine how common symptoms were or prove that one symptom causes another. Instead, researchers focused on patients' experiences. Three themes emerged: "noise really hurts," "broken spirit level," and "amplified apprehension."

NOISE SENSITIVITY was especially prominent among people with prolonged recoveries, all of whom reported difficulty with noise. Some were distressed by sudden sounds, while others struggled with layered sounds such as conversations in busy environments. Some avoided noisy places or used earplugs or noise-canceling headphones. The researchers note that while these strategies can provide relief, long-term avoidance may increase sound sensitivity.

VESTIBULAR PROBLEMS were reported by nine of the 14 participants, including dizziness, imbalance, difficulty knowing where their body was in space, and visual symptoms. These problems occurred in both groups but were more common and disruptive among those with prolonged recovery. Participants described losing confidence in their body's ability to tell them where they were in space. Movement that had once happened automatically suddenly required thought and caution.

Participants also described vision challenges like difficulty focusing their eyes, fatigue while reading, queasiness associated with eye movements, and a sense that their visual problems were connected to their balance.

The researchers also caution that post-concussion dizziness does not necessarily come from the vestibular system alone. Problems involving the neck, autonomic nervous system, or other body systems can produce similar symptoms.

ANXIETY AND FEAR were also common, particularly among people with longer recoveries. Participants described fear of falling, driving, returning to activities, or triggering symptoms. The study does not suggest that anxiety causes concussion symptoms. Instead, it highlights how physical symptoms and emotional responses can become intertwined, with fear and avoidance potentially limiting activity and participation.

WHEN SYMPTOMS INTERACT

Researchers also explored whether vestibular problems, noise sensitivity, and anxiety influence one another. The findings were not straightforward. Only a few participants clearly recognized connections between these symptoms, although some described symptoms intensifying together.

One participant explained that when sensory stimulation became "too much," dizziness often followed. Another became physically ill from the noise in a restaurant. Fatigue also appeared to worsen symptoms for some participants.

TAKEAWAYS

The researchers emphasize that the study was small and cannot establish cause and effect. More research is needed.

Still, the study highlights why concussion recovery may need to be viewed beyond individual symptoms. Dizziness, balance, vision, sound sensitivity, fatigue, and emotional responses can overlap and affect daily life.

For healthcare professionals, the findings suggest asking broader questions—not simply "Are you dizzy?" but where dizziness happens, what environments overwhelm a patient, how their eyes are affected, what sounds bother them, and what activities they have stopped doing because they are afraid of triggering symptoms.

Source: Miller R, Dunn JA, O'Beirne GA, Whitney SL, Snell D. "Mild traumatic brain injury recovery: a qualitative study of noise sensitivity, vestibular issues and anxiety interactions." Brain Impairment. 2026;27(3):IB25095.



COMING UP
DECEMBER 1, 2026

#Giving TUESDAY

GIFT MATCHING = DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

Your #GivingTuesday gift will be doubled up to $4,500 to advance vestibular **research**, raise **awareness**, and offer a **lifeline** to people who are suffering!

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT AT VESTIBULAR.ORG/GT

4 TIPS TO MAKE YOUR GIFT GO EVEN FARTHER!

1. Give before the Giving Tuesday match expires at midnight on 12/1/26
2. Choose "ACH" as your payment method while donating online to avoid credit card fees being deducted from your donation
3. Donate from your Donor Advised Fund, IRA, or your stock portfolio
4. Consider giving monthly to provide reliable funding that works with your budget

Please reach out with questions or to learn more about how your gift can have the biggest impact at **DEVELOPMENT@VESTIBULAR.ORG**

HONORING THE IMPACT OF
PATTY GEREND

For Patty, giving to VeDA is about giving back to a community that changed her life and advancing the science that can change others'. As both a vestibular patient and a dedicated volunteer leader serving on VeDA's Board of Directors and Medical Advocacy Committee, Patty combines compassion with action.

" VeDA provides education, support, and advocacy that patients simply can't find anywhere else. Every dollar and every hour I give helps people feel seen, understood, and hopeful again. "

Through her volunteer service, Patty helps shape VeDA's advocacy and research. Drawing on her professional background in data science, she contributes to the growth and integrity of VeDA's Dizziness, Vertigo, and Imbalance Patient Registry—a cornerstone initiative that collects information from patients worldwide to inform research and improve care. Her work ensures that the patient voice is represented in meaningful, measurable ways that researchers and clinicians use to advance understanding of vestibular disorders.

This year, Patty chose to make her annual gift in a new way: by directing a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from her Individual Retirement Account (IRA). A QCD allows individuals aged 70 or older to donate directly from their IRA to a qualified nonprofit like VeDA without counting the distribution as taxable income.

" For me, it was a smart and satisfying choice. By giving through my IRA, I was able to contribute more than I could have otherwise, and the entire amount went straight to VeDA's mission. "

Her decision to make a QCD underscores the power of thoughtful giving. It has enabled her to make an even larger impact, building a world where people with vestibular disorders get all the support and medical care they need to live full, balanced lives.

" VeDA gives patients a voice and connects them to hope. That's why I volunteer, and that's why I give. Together, we're changing what it means to live with dizziness. "



GIVE FROM YOUR IRA

If you are age 70 or older, you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) directly from your IRA to VeDA. This type of gift:

- Counts toward your required minimum distribution (RMD)
- Is excluded from your taxable income
- Can reduce your overall tax burden
- Allows your full donation to go directly to supporting vestibular education, research, and advocacy

To make a QCD gift, contact your IRA administrator and provide VeDA's legal name and tax ID: Vestibular Disorders Association (EIN 93-0914340)

For more information, visit **VESTIBULAR.ORG/DONATE** or email **development@vestibular.org**.

SUPPORTERS WHO ARE MAKING A BIG DIFFERENCE

MS. AMY LOUIS **MS. MARGARET STACK**

MS. GAIL WALLER **MS. RINDA WILSON**

Like the generous supporters above who recently gave $500 or more, you can help people who are in crisis because of dizziness, vertigo, and imbalance get an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment and save them from their spinning nightmare. Whether you can give $5, $50, or $500, your gift matters!

Visit **VESTIBULAR.ORG/OTLDONATE** to make a difference today.

STAYING CONNECTED WITH A VESTIBULAR CONDITION

RELATIONSHIPS

By Karen R. Mizrach

> **Decades of research have established that social relationships are a fundamental human need—not a luxury, but a biological requirement for health and survival. - AGCARE**

When my vestibular symptoms first appeared, it was all I could do to take care of myself. It was goodbye to my career and travel. It was goodbye to long hikes, restaurants, and shopping. And, sadly, for a long time, it was goodbye to having energy for people and relationships.

Our relationships with people take a lot of energy and attention. When you can't work or drive, navigate the walk to the mailbox, or even get safely to the bathroom, relationships often get sent to the bottom of the priority list. Our primary focus becomes survival.

But we need people. We need them not just in good, happy, high-functioning times. We need them all the time, including the most challenging and scary times. The trick is how to stay connected to people and relationships when we are struggling.

How do we participate in a friendship, partnership, or as a neighbor when we aren't feeling well? And, trickier yet, how do we make new connections when we are at our worst?



FIGHT FOR THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER MOST

> **Sometimes the greatest strength is just putting your feet on the ground and telling the world: 'I'm still here!' - Poem 'Sometimes' by Senator Cory Booker**

As tempting as it is to fade away and isolate when you are suffering, try to stay connected to the few, or even the one, most important people in your life.

This will require reaching out and being very honest about your health condition. Maybe a conversation about your need to change how you spend time together and to explore other ways to stay connected would be helpful. Encourage your person to hang in with you, and reassure them you will continue to be there for them.

Maybe they will stay on board and maybe they won't, but that will be their decision. All you can do is speak up and express your desire to stay in relationship.

TALK WITH PEOPLE ABOUT THINGS OTHER THAN YOUR HEALTH

Relationships are still two-way, even though right now you may need more than before.

In your effort to stay connected, remember to ask about people's lives, families, jobs, and interests. It's not only important for your relationships to be able to focus on someone else, but it will also benefit your health to make space for topics other than your challenges.

Your nervous system will thank you for the break from constant vigilance and fear. And your people will appreciate that you are still there, you are still you.

NOT ALL RELATIONSHIPS WILL SURVIVE

> **I definitely have lost relationships through this journey. Some I have had to, like disconnect from knowing that they just didn't serve my nervous system the right way. - Joy Mohr on VeDA's *ICU - "I See You"* Podcast**

It's natural throughout life that people come and go from our circle. Not all friendships, family members, and co-workers are forever.

When you get sick and your life changes drastically, some people will disappear, and you may need to back away from others.

It can surprise us which ones won't remain in our lives, for whatever reason. It's OK. Try to focus on the people who are still in your life, and those who are willing to adjust to your new circumstances. As we let some connections go, we can grieve the losses, retain the memories, and move forward.

REDEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

> **It takes courage to make plans you'll probably have to cancel... It takes courage to watch other people's lives go on when yours feels stuck... It takes courage to stand when you're afraid of falling (literally). - Poem by Jo Ivie**

It might be time to redefine what it means to be a friend, a helper, a lover, a neighbor.

Maybe we no longer go to all the parties, shows, or sports events. And maybe we aren't comfortable having more than one social event in a week. And maybe intimacy with your partner looks different. But we can still be connected without all the activity and busyness. We can find new ways to connect with others.

It will take some work to reestablish how you share time with people. This requires defining clearly your limits, your needs, and when you just can't show up. It also requires communicating in what ways you can show up.

Maybe you aren't ready to go to a restaurant or travel, but you might be able to sit in the park or meet at a coffee shop. Identify what you can do, and also what you are willing to try.

When you are ready, gradually put yourself in challenging environments for limited amounts of time. This is similar



to our work in physical therapy, when we try movements or exercises that challenge our systems, then back down when it's enough.

CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

> **I know myself so much better going through this journey, learning about it, studying. And realizing I don't need a big circle, I need solid, good people that can bring meaning to my life.**
> **- Joy Mohr on VeDA's *ICU - "I See You"* Podcast**

In this age of virtual options, there are endless ways to explore new connections and relationships.

As you increase confidence and your symptoms begin to calm, you can venture out into new places to meet people. What you are comfortable doing may be different than your pre-vestibular self, but that's fine. Accept your new limits and search for what comes next.

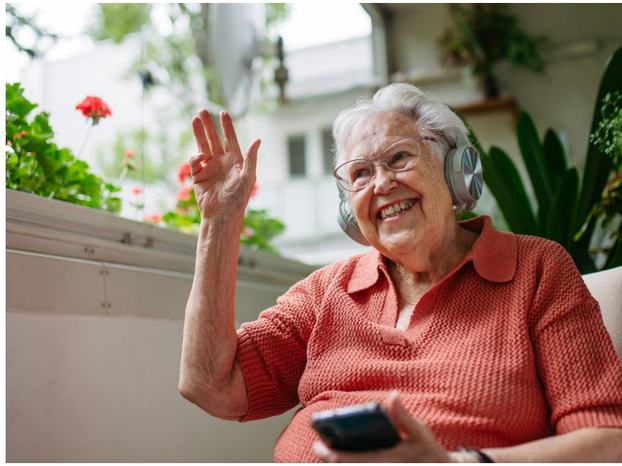
TIPS FOR CONNECTING

SUPPORT GROUPS | This may involve people who share your challenges or people who have something else in common with you. Online or in-person groups offer quality interactions that can fill a void and add meaning to life. Often you'll find a like-minded person, which can lead to a new friendship.

HOBBIES | It's important to have activities and interests that do not focus on vestibular challenges. Make time and energy to explore other interests. Pick one thing to begin with that feels manageable, either online or in person. Pace yourself and see how it goes. It may take a few tries to find a group of people and an activity that feels comfortable. If one doesn't work, move on, don't wallow in failure. View it more as an experiment.

SITTING OUTSIDE | Simply saying hello to people who pass by your porch can brighten your day. Even starting up a simple conversation feels like being involved in the world. These small interactions may just be a nice moment, or may lead to a new friendship.

DATING | Our needs for romance, love, and intimacy don't end with a disability. Dating is tricky at the best of times, but it is still an option for us. Be open to the idea and trust that someone will accept you exactly as you are, dizziness and all. Jacqueline Child, creator of Dateability (a dating app for people with disabilities), suggests, "Communication is key when dating with a vestibular disorder, and discussing your vestibular condition is a very vulnerable thing to do. Keep explanations short and simple. Practice can help, whether it be with close friends and family, or going on some dates just to practice how you share your story with someone new."



HOW TO CONTRIBUTE WHEN YOU HAVE LITTLE TO GIVE

Sometimes we are the givers, and sometimes we are the receivers in a relationship. There are many ways you can still be a loving, giving participant in your relationships even with reduced abilities. Make a simple meal for a family member or a friend. Check in on a friend or neighbor. Listen to your person and focus solely on them. Even when you are dizzy or struggling, you can be loving and supportive and interested in someone you care about. That's really what all of us need.

FLAMINGO DAYS

By Gemma Clarke

I thought it was anxiety, now that's just
wishful thinking,
Instead it's constant rocking, like I've
always been drinking.

It starts as something subtle, just a
feeling not quite right,
Then builds into a storm that I can't
stop or try to fight.

But slowly I am learning there's a
strength in how I cope,
Even on the hardest days I'm holding
onto hope.

Like a flamingo standing tall on legs
that shake and sway,
Finding balance in the chaos, learning
strength a different way.

They can lose their colour slowly when
their bodies are worn down,
Fading from bright pink to pale, like a
version dimmed somehow.

But with time and care and healing,
they can find that pink again,
And that's what I am working towards,
I'll get there in the end.

Above is just an excerpt of this 2026 Poetry-4-Balance winner. To read the full poem and the other winning pieces, visit:

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