VALLEYHEALTH

Vertigo: What It Is and How to Treat It

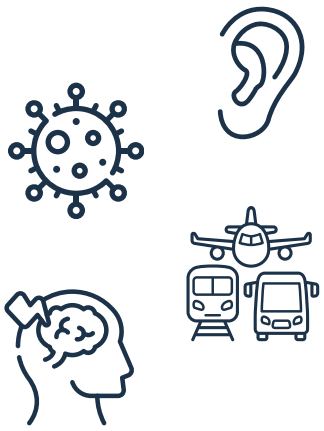
Vertigo is the feeling that you or the room is spinning. It's common — about 1 in 5 adults will feel it at some point. Vertigo is a **symptom,** not a disease. The goal is to find the cause and treat it.

It's important to tell dizziness from true vertigo. Use this quick guide:

- **Dizziness:** Feeling lightheaded or woozy; unsteady on your feet
- **Vertigo:** True spinning, like a merry-go-round

True spinning often points to an inner ear problem.

Common Causes of Vertigo



- **Inner ear "crystals" (BPPV):** Tiny calcium pieces move into a balance canal. Looking up, rolling in bed, or lying back triggers a brief spin (often 10–15 seconds), then it stops.
- **Inner ear virus:** A sudden, strong spell that lasts hours or a day, with lingering unsteadiness. Not tied to position.
- **Motion sensitivity:** Cars, boats, or quick head turns can set off symptoms.
- **Less common causes:** Tumors or strokes are rare but must be ruled out if warning signs are present.

Hearing and balance share the same inner ear system, so hearing tests can be very helpful for finding the cause.

How Providers Find the Cause

Your care team may:

- Ask when spells happen and what triggers them
- Check your ears, eyes, and balance
- Order a **hearing test**
- Use **MRI** only when needed to rule out rare but serious problems

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Treatments That Help

- **For BPPV (crystals):** Repositioning maneuvers in the clinic move crystals out of the canal. Many people feel better right away. (Patients often say they were “flipped on the table.”)
- **For inner ear virus:** Short-term medicines can ease severe spinning and nausea. Vestibular (balance) exercises help your brain recover.
- **For motion sensitivity:** Gradual exposure and balance therapy reduce symptoms over time.
- **Everyday tips:** Stay hydrated, move slowly, and rise from bed in stages.

What You Can Do During a Spell

- Sit or lie down right away to avoid falls
- Keep your head still and focus on a spot until the spinning eases
- Avoid driving, ladders, and risky activities
- If rolling in bed triggers symptoms, try sleeping with your head slightly raised

When To Seek Care Urgently

Call 911 or go to the ER if vertigo comes with any of the following:

- New trouble speaking, weakness, or numbness
- Double vision or a severe headache
- Fainting or chest pain
- A sudden new hearing loss in one ear

You don’t have to live with spinning. If vertigo is affecting your life, talk with your healthcare provider about the cause and the best treatment for you.

For more information, visit valleyhealth.org.