

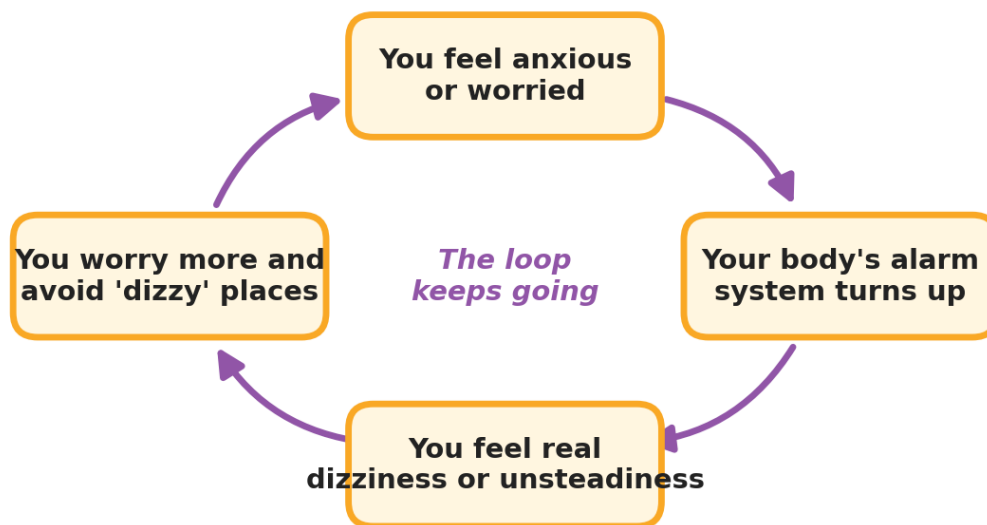
Understanding Anxiety and Dizziness

Anxiety-related dizziness — information for patients

Your clinician has told you that your dizziness may be linked to anxiety, panic, or fast breathing. This leaflet explains what that means, why anxiety can make you genuinely dizzy, what helps, and when to seek urgent help. Please bring it with you to your follow-up appointment.

What is anxiety-related dizziness?

How the anxiety-dizziness loop works



Anxiety and dizziness can feed each other in a loop — the good news is the loop can be broken.

Your inner-ear balance organs are wired into the same part of the brain that controls fear and alarm. When you feel anxious, that alarm system becomes more sensitive, and your brain pays too much attention to normal balance signals. The result is real dizziness, unsteadiness, or a floating, 'spaced-out' feeling — often worse in busy, crowded or visually busy places such as supermarkets, shopping centres, or when scrolling on a screen.

Sometimes it starts the other way around: a genuine bout of vertigo or an inner-ear upset frightens you, and the worry about it happening again keeps the dizziness going long after the original problem has settled.

Key idea: Anxiety-related dizziness is real, common, and treatable. It is not 'all in your head', and it is not dangerous — and most people get much better with the right help.

What does it feel like?

- Dizziness, lightheadedness, or a floating, off-balance feeling — often without the room spinning.
- Worse in busy, crowded, or visually busy places, or in wide open spaces.
- Palpitations, tingling in the lips or hands, chest tightness, or a 'spaced-out' feeling.
- A tendency to avoid the places or activities that bring it on.

Why does it happen?

Fast or deep breathing — which often happens without you noticing when you are anxious — lowers the carbon dioxide in your blood. This tightens the blood vessels to the brain and adds to the lightheadedness and tingling. Worry and avoiding 'dizzy' situations then keep the loop going. None of this means there is anything seriously wrong with your brain or your ears.

What helps?

- Slow, gentle breathing retraining to settle the overbreathing.
- Vestibular physiotherapy — gentle exercises that retrain your balance, often by carefully facing the situations you have been avoiding.
- Talking therapy, especially cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), to ease the frightened thoughts that feed the loop.
- Sometimes a low-dose medicine that calms the alarm system. It may briefly make the dizziness worse for a week or two before it improves — so do not give up early.
- Gentle, graded return to the places you have been avoiding — this is part of the cure, not a risk.

When to get checked urgently: See a doctor promptly if you develop sudden severe spinning that will not settle, new hearing loss or ringing in one ear, double vision, slurred speech, facial or limb weakness, severe headache, or fainting. These are not features of anxiety and need to be checked.