

Understanding Post-Concussion Dizziness

Post-concussion dizziness — information for patients

Your clinician has told you that you have, or may have, dizziness related to a concussion or head injury. This leaflet explains what this means, why you feel dizzy or unsteady, and the things that genuinely help you recover. Please bring any questions to your next appointment.

What is post-concussion dizziness?

Post-concussion dizziness is common and treatable — and it often has more than one cause at the same time.

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury that briefly disturbs how the brain uses energy and how the balance organs in your inner ear and the balance pathways in your brain work together. Dizziness and unsteadiness are among the most common problems afterwards. For most people they settle within days to a few weeks; in some they last longer, and that is when a vestibular (balance) clinician can help. It is real, and in most people it is not a sign that something dangerous has been missed.

When to seek urgent help

In the first days after a head injury, seek urgent medical care (or call 000) if you have a severe or rapidly worsening headache, repeated vomiting, weakness, numbness or slurred speech, seizures, fainting, increasing confusion or drowsiness, or clear fluid from the nose or ears. These are uncommon, but they need to be checked straight away.

What are the symptoms?

- Dizziness, light-headedness, unsteadiness, or a feeling of movement that is not really there.
- Short bursts of spinning when you roll over in bed or look up — often from tiny inner-ear crystals knocked loose by the injury.
- Feeling worse in busy visual places — supermarkets, screens, scrolling, or traffic.
- Headache, neck pain, tiredness, poor concentration or 'brain fog', and sensitivity to light or noise.
- Symptoms that are often worse with activity, screens or stress, and ease with short rest early on.

How is post-concussion dizziness diagnosed?

There is no single test. Your clinician makes the diagnosis from your history — the injury, your symptoms and their timeline — and a careful examination of your eyes, balance and neck. Simple positional tests check for loose inner-ear crystals, and a short eye-movement screen checks how your balance and visual systems are coping. Specialised balance tests or a scan are only needed in certain situations, which your clinician will explain if they apply to you.

How is post-concussion dizziness treated?

Because there is usually more than one cause, treatment is matched to what is driving your dizziness — and the parts work best together. Most people improve over weeks to a few months.

- **Step 1 — Treating loose inner-ear crystals: if these are found, a simple series of guided head movements done in the clinic can settle the spinning quickly.**
- **Step 2 — Balance retraining (vestibular rehabilitation): a physiotherapist guides paced exercises to rebuild your tolerance for movement and busy visual scenes, increased gradually so symptoms are not flared.**

- **Step 3 — Gentle, graded exercise:** light activity kept just below the level that brings on your symptoms is one of the best-proven ways to help the brain recover faster.
- **Step 4 — Other support:** a talking therapy can help if worry or low mood have crept in, and some people benefit from a low dose of a medicine that calms the balance or headache pathways. Long rest and motion-sickness tablets taken for weeks slow recovery, so they are used only briefly.

What you can do to help yourself

- Return to your normal activities step by step, rather than resting completely or pushing through symptoms.
- Keep up the exercises your physiotherapist gives you — consistency matters more than intensity.
- Look after your sleep, fluids and meals, and manage stress — all of these affect dizziness.
- Limit alcohol, and avoid a second knock to the head while you are still recovering.
- Do not drive if you feel too unsteady to be safe, and ask your clinician if you are unsure.

What happens over the long term?

Most people recover well, although it usually takes weeks to months rather than days. Recovery is faster when each cause is identified and treated and when you stay gently active. If symptoms last beyond about six months despite treatment, your clinician will review the plan and may involve a wider team. A small number of people develop a longer-lasting pattern — such as persistent postural-perceptual dizziness (PPPD) or migraine-related dizziness — and both have their own effective treatments.

Reducing the impact on your life

- Tell family, friends, school or work what post-concussion dizziness is and how it affects you.
- If you play sport, follow a graded return-to-sport plan and do not return until you are cleared, to avoid a second injury.
- Treat headaches, migraine, anxiety and low mood actively — all can make the dizziness worse.
- Return to your exercises and strategies early if a busy patch or another illness sets you back.
- Keep your follow-up appointments so your progress can be tracked and your treatment adjusted.

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