

Dizziness in Multiple Sclerosis

What causes dizziness and vertigo in Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) can affect all parts of the balance system because the information your brain receives and the replies it sends can be late, incomplete or misleading. Any problem with the messages in the balance system can produce dizziness or vertigo symptoms.

People affected by dizziness with MS often assume that it is just another part of their condition, but they are also just as likely as anyone else to have a problem with the inner ear (vestibular apparatus) i.e. from an infection, injury or with age.

It is important to find out what is causing the dizziness so that you get the right treatment.

Did you know?

One in 5 people with MS will be affected by dizziness, vertigo and balance problems directly relating their MS.

What are the common symptoms?

- Vertigo (a sensation of spinning)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Unsteadiness
- Muzzy headedness
- Veering to the side when walking
- Dizziness brought on by certain movements
- Feeling anxious or overwhelmed in busy environments

Symptoms can vary person to person and may be influenced by other long-standing MS symptoms, e.g. blurred or double vision, numbness or tingling in the arms and legs, weakness and fatigue.

What do I do if I have these symptoms?

Any new symptoms should be reported to your GP, neurologist or nurse specialist. They may recommend tests to find out what is causing your dizziness and may give you some medication to help reduce your symptoms. A referral to a physiotherapist trained in the treatment of dizziness is recommended if your symptoms do not improve on their own.

How can physiotherapy help with vertigo and dizziness?

Physiotherapists trained in Vestibular Rehabilitation can identify whether your dizziness is a result of changes to your nervous system from the MS, whether you have a problem with your inner ear or a combination of both. Once the cause has been identified, your physiotherapist can provide you with treatment and exercises to help you with your symptoms. These exercises may involve a combination of head and eye movements, balance and walking exercises.

Sometimes the exercises can cause your dizziness to feel a little worse to start with. This is normal and it is important that you try to continue with them to make the best recovery.

Occasionally you may be prescribed medication to help with the dizzy symptoms but many of these are only effective in the short term, could delay recovery and can make the exercises less effective.

What can I do to help?

The most important thing you can do is to try and keep moving around as normally as possible.

Many people with MS who experience dizziness have a problem just with their inner ear. This type of dizziness is very responsive to rehabilitation with dizzy symptoms improving for most people. Continuing your normal activity is encouraged to make the best recovery.

If symptoms are treated and resolve they may never recur, other symptoms may never completely go away, but most people respond well to treatment. Occasionally symptoms may come back when you are stressed or unwell. If this happens please talk to your health care professional about a referral back to your physiotherapist.

Useful websites:

mstrust.org.uk

mssociety.org.uk

nice.org.uk/guidance/ng220