

Medicines and Dizziness

This patient information leaflet provides answers to commonly asked questions about the link between medicines and dizziness.

Why are medicines important?

Medicine is an important part of treating and controlling a wide range of symptoms linked to different medical conditions. Almost half of all adults take prescription medication, most commonly to treat cholesterol, high blood pressure and pain. A quarter of people report taking at least 3 prescribed medicines a week.

Did you know?

- 70% of people over 75 take 3 or more prescribed medicines a week.

Do medicines cause dizziness?

Yes. Dizziness accounts for 5% of all reported drug side effects. Dizziness, lightheaded-ness and imbalance are a side effect of many common drugs. This can increase the risk of falling and injury. Falls are one of the biggest causes of injuries and many people end up in accident and emergency.

Some medicines can make your balance system worse or prevent you recovering well from an acute episode of dizziness. These medicines are called vestibular suppressants e.g. Prochlorperazine, Cinnarizine, Cyclazine, Promethazine etc. Some help to treat an acute attack of dizziness but if taken long term can stop your natural recovery. Some medicines for other problems may affect your inner ear or balance system e.g. antibiotics which are toxic to your inner ear and balance/ vestibular organ.

Did you know?

- The more medicines you take, the higher your risk of a fall.
- If medicines for dizziness (vestibular suppressants) are taken for a long time after an acute episode you are more likely to experience long-term problems with dizziness and balance.

Top Tips

- If you are over 70 and on 3 or more medications, you should ask your doctor or community pharmacist for a medication review every 6 months.
- Only take dizziness medication for as short a time possible (1-3 days) before reviewing whether you need to continue taking it.

What medications cause dizziness?

Different medications have different effects in the body. They can act on the brain and nervous system, the inner ear, vision and the sensors for touch, muscle and joint awareness. They can also affect hormones and the cardiovascular systems e.g. blood pressure, heart rate etc. These medications can potentially cause dizziness. For example blood pressure medications work by keeping your blood pressure lower and slow down the speed at which it changes. For example if you are lying in bed and stand quickly you may feel dizzy and lightheaded until your blood pressure adjusts to being stood up right. If you take 2 or more blood pressure medications they can react with each other to make the drop in blood pressure worse and may even cause you to faint or black out. It is important that you report to your GP and tell them about any symptoms you may experience e.g. dizziness, palpitations, nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, fainting etc.

Did you know?

- Taking medication (e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen) for pain more than twice a week can cause headaches and dizziness as well as an increase in your pain, pain sensitivity, and cause rebound pain or headaches.
- The most common cause of dizziness and vertigo is BPPV which does not resolve with medication.
- Recreational drugs e.g. cannabis, cocaine, amphetamines, heroin, can also cause dizziness.

How do I know if a medication is the cause of my dizziness?

Having information about medication history is important. It is essential to know about your drug tolerance, previous experience of a drug and drug allergies. If you are concerned about dizziness and think your medication may be involved please speak to your Doctor, Nurse or Independent Prescriber.

A **TREND** review helps find information about symptoms of dizziness and possible connections to the medications you are taking.

- **T**iming: Did symptoms start around the time of a new drug? Are you taking a drug that causes side effects over time (e.g. opioids / antiepileptics)?
- **R**e-challenge: If you take the drug again do the side effects occur?
- **E**xperience: Have you had the drug before and did you experience any adverse reactions?
- **N**ature: Are the symptoms a recognised side effect of the drug think are causing dizziness?
- **D**e-challenge: Do symptoms resolve when the medication is stopped?

Most common medicines causing dizziness can be found below but this list is not exclusive, and medications should not be stopped without discussing it first with your GP or the person who prescribed them.

| Condition | Common medications with the reported side effect of dizziness |
|----------------------------|---|
| Blood pressure | Propranolol, Atenolol, Bisoprolol, Candesartan, Losartan, Irbesartan, Ramipril, Nicorandil, Amlodipine etc. |
| Epilepsy/ muscle relaxants | Phenytoin, Carbamazepine, Gabapentin, Pregabalin, Topiramate, Lamotrigine, Baclofen, Tizanidine, Cannabis extract, Dantrolene, Diazepam, etc. |
| Anxiety/ Depression | Fluoxetine, Trazodone, Sertraline, Citalopram, Mirtazapine, Paroxetine etc. |
| Cholesterol | Simvastatin, Atorvastatin etc. |
| Antibiotics | Ciprofloxacin, Amoxicillin, Azithromycin, Erythromycin, Vancomycin, Gentamicin etc. |
| Pain killers | Paracetamol, Codeine, Dihydrocodeine, Co-codamol, Tramadol, Fentanyl, Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Diclofenac etc. |

Top Tips

- Do not stop taking medication without consulting your GP, Pharmacist, Nurse or Independent Prescriber.
- It maybe possible to reduce the amount of medication you are on by making some simple changes to your diet and lifestyle. Your GP practice, Pharmacist, Physiotherapist or Practice Nurse can help develop a programme for you, monitor the effects and advise on whether it is safe to stop any of your medications.
- Making small changes can make a big difference.

Why not try:

- Take a brisk walk for 30 minutes every day in the daylight, with moderate exertion and look around, moving your head, taking notice of the detail in the world around you.
- Try healthy eating, cut out processed foods, try to cook unprocessed fresh food.
- Stay hydrated and drink 2-3 liters of fluid daily.
- Avoid too much caffeine found in tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks and chocolate etc.
- Eat and sleep at the same time through the week.
- Try something new like tai chi, adult ballet classes, yoga or bowling.