

# VESTIBULAR INVESTIGATION UNIT

## Vestibular Tests. What Is Involved?

*Vestibular* is a word that describes the balance function coming from your ears.

The Vestibular Investigation Unit was set up by the University of Melbourne and the Eye & Ear Hospital to help people with dizziness problems. Balance disorders can cause great discomfort and can be difficult to treat. We can help by working with your specialist to find out what is causing the problem. Once the problem is identified, the most appropriate management can be put in place.

The initial part of the balance test usually involves a hearing assessment. This is done to assess the hearing part of the inner ear, the cochlea. The inner ear includes the cochlea and vestibular organs, and therefore the hearing test may help in diagnosing a balance problem.



There are different types of assessment of the vestibular (balance) system and all are very easy tests. One is called caloric stimulation. This involves cool and warm air being inserted into the ear canal for about one minute. We do this to create a temperature change that causes the fluid in the inner ear to move. For most people, this test will result in a slight feeling of dizziness that lasts for only 1-2 minutes.

There are many balance reflexes in our bodies that originate when the inner ear detects movements. We all use these balance reflexes to help the muscles in our bodies maintain stable posture and assist ambulation. We can test one of these muscle reflexes in your neck by simply placing recording electrodes on your neck, then monitoring the muscle activity when you raise your head off the pillow and listen to 'clicks' through headphones. Most people with only fair or moderate fitness can perform this test easily.

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Another vestibular test routinely performed is rotational chair testing. In this test, the person sits in a chair and is rotated slowly back and forth. As it is performed in the dark, there can be some slight dizziness experienced as the chair moves. However, we would like to reassure you that the chair rotates no faster than when turning around on an office 'wheelie' chair.

Vestibular testing is an important part of management for people with particular dizziness problems. The audiologists understand that some patients may be a little anxious about the tests and are happy to answer any questions or concerns. They are also available to help the patient understand more about their hearing and balance as many people find this very interesting and informative.



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