

Understanding dizziness & your body

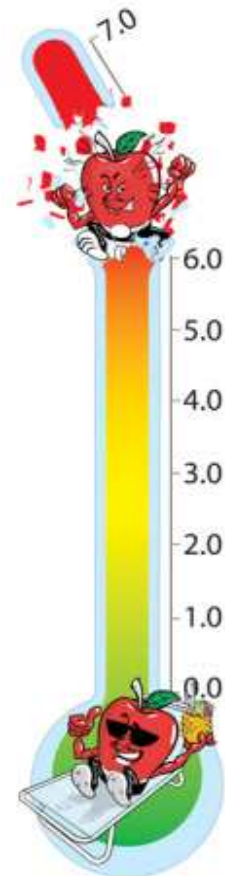
We often link our dizziness symptoms to a problem with our balance organ. However, sometimes dizziness symptoms can be related to our emotional state. Some examples of such symptoms include:

- **Vague, persistent sensations of dizziness**
- **Frequent periods of rocking or swaying**
- **Light headedness**
- **Sweating**
- **Trembling/Shaking**
- **Heart racing**
- **Nausea**

Most people that experience dizziness and balance problems will at some stage experience unpleasant emotions such as:



- **Fear**
- **Panic**
- **Anxiety**
- **Embarrassment**
- **Stress**
- **Frustration**
- **Anger**



For some people, these unpleasant emotions can become debilitating. In fact, studies have shown that about 25% of patients with chronic dizziness have been diagnosed with an emotional condition¹. Probably the most common emotional conditions for people with dizziness are anxiety and depression.

¹ (Staab & Ruckenstein, 2003)

According to the research, there are three different ways that emotional problems can be linked to dizziness¹:

1. Your balance organ causes dizziness & balance difficulties. → Your dizziness & balance difficulties then **trigger** emotional problems like anxiety and depression
2. Your balance organ causes dizziness & balance difficulties. → Your dizziness and balance difficulties then make a **pre-existing** emotional condition worse.
3. You have a pre-existing emotional condition. → Your pre-existing emotional condition **causes symptoms** of dizziness and imbalance.

“I’m not imagining my problem – it’s real”

Whether dizziness has caused emotional difficulties or emotional difficulties have caused dizziness, the dizziness is NOT imagined!!! The dizziness or balance difficulty is real.

Most people experiencing dizziness and balance difficulties will also experience unpleasant and unhelpful emotions. It is important for you to recognise when you are experiencing unhelpful emotions because they may affect your recovery and ability to cope. The following checklist may help you identify if you are experiencing unhelpful emotions that may be related to your dizziness and balance difficulties:

- Do you feel tense most of the time?
- Do you worry about things?
- Do 'upsets' affect your sleep or appetite?
- Do you tend to think the worst things may happen in any stressful situation?
- When you worry do you tend to breathe quickly and does your heart start racing?
- Do you feel down-hearted and blue?
- Do you feel like you have nothing to look forward to?
- Do you feel like withdrawing from your family and friends?
- Do you feel like life is just too hard?

“What can I do to reduce dizziness symptoms caused by emotional symptoms?”

Breathe. During dizziness episodes sit down and make a conscious effort to take some deep, slow breathes. This may help you to relax until the episode passes.

Develop new ways to cope with stress by:

- Finding time to relax (eg join a meditation class).
- Talking to a friend or family member about things that worry you.
- Playing with a pet.
- Listening to a favourite CD.
- Writing down the things that worry you.
- Painting, drawing or doing a jigsaw puzzle.

Undergo the health tests recommended by your medical practitioner. Learning that the symptoms are not caused by a serious illness can help reduce stress.

- Balance problems are often complex and management input may be recommended from several related areas including neurology, otology, audiology, physiotherapy, and psychology.
- Consult with your family doctor and develop strategies for reducing stress in your life.

Remain active. Exercise can help your balance system (in your brain) correct for the unwanted dizziness symptoms. Research has also shown that exercise causes endorphins to be released into your body and this helps you to feel healthy and happy.

- Try regular exercise, such as walking.
- Tai Chi classes can improve your balance.
- Vestibular physiotherapy can help you ‘habituate’ to unwanted dizziness symptoms during a graded exercise programme. This specialised physiotherapy will also help improve your balance. You can find a list of vestibular physiotherapy services at our webpage:
http://www.medoto.unimelb.edu.au/oto/VIU-Vestibular_Physiotherapy.html

A psychologist specialises in understanding the connection between emotional well-being and health issues like dizziness and balance problems. The following psychologists specialise in dizziness and balance problems².

- Dr Louisa Hoey
Carlton and Doncaster East
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- Grazia Marin
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Tel: 03 9331 0822

² Last updated 30 May 2008. Please note that the facilities or services listed here are for information purposes only, and that the VIU does not endorse any particular centre or claim this document contains all available services. If you would like your facility added to this list then please contact the VIU.

A health psychologist can help you develop ways to identify emotional symptoms that may be related to your health issues. The following provides a link to information about health psychologists.

- <http://www.psychology.org.au/community/specialist/health/>
- Locate a health psychologist close to you by calling the Australian Psychological Society Referral Service on 1800 333 497 or emailing referral@psychology.org.au

For further information, contact:

VESTIBULAR INVESTIGATION UNIT

University Of Melbourne and Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital Audiology Service

Ph. (03) 9929 8740

<http://www.bionicear.org/oto/vestibular.html>

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