



A Healthy Balance

Seniors Can Take Steps to Minimize Falls, Other Balance Issues Caused by Dizziness

From the time as infants when we first pull ourselves up on our two feet, we spend the bulk of our lives upright. But as we grow older, we're faced with a variety of health issues that can severely impact our balance, leading to a greater risk of fall injuries during our senior years.

Steady as we go...

Dizziness can happen for a variety of reasons: poor circulation, vertigo, injury, infection, allergies, or even neurological disease. While dizziness is treatable, it is critical that you consult with a physician to determine why it is happening, and what the best treatments are for your particular ailment.

Physicians say that you can help maintain your balance with a program of activity and exercise. If you have hypertension, diabetes, or other chronic illnesses, you should manage these appropriately. Some medications, particularly sedatives, can affect your balance and you should discuss this possibility with your primary care physician. Some types of dizziness that are associated with position changes can be easily managed through simple maneuvers.

Why falls happen to seniors...

The elderly face a natural weakening of their bodies as they grow older, caused in part by inactivity and injuries that, over time, damage the central nervous system. For example, the sensory cells in the ears' balance system gradually decrease and cannot be replaced. Additionally, the nerves carrying sensory information to the brain to perform complex brain interconnections will lose fiber and nerve cells.

Some Tips for Preventing Falls:

- Have hearing and vision check-ups regularly. If hearing and vision are impaired, important cues that help maintain balance can be lost.
- Get up slowly. A momentary drop in blood pressure can cause dizziness when standing up too quickly.
- Use a cane or walker to help maintain balance on uneven ground or slippery surfaces. Wear sturdy, low-heeled shoes with wide, nonslip soles.
- Exercise to improve your strength, muscle tone, and coordination. Walking is a good form of exercise.

Remember: Most cases of dizziness and motion sickness are mild, self-treatable disorders. But severe cases and those that become progressively worse deserve the attention of a physician with specialized skills in diseases of the ear, nose, throat, equilibrium, and neurological systems.

If you feel you or a loved one is suffering from dizziness or balance issues, you should consult an otolaryngologist for a medical diagnosis. Go to www.entnet.org for more information.