Do You Have a Balance Problem?

Have you ever felt dizzy, lightheaded, or as if the room were spinning around you? These can be very troublesome sensations. If the feeling happens often, it could be a sign of a balance problem. Balance problems are among the most common reasons that older adults seek help from a doctor.

Having good balance means being able to control and maintain your body's position, whether you are moving or remaining still. An intact sense of balance helps you

* walk without staggering
* get up from a chair without falling
* climb stairs without tripping
* bend over without falling.

Good balance is important to help you get around, stay independent, and carry out daily activities. Some balance disorders are caused by problems in the inner ear. The part of the inner ear that is responsible for balance is the vestibular system, also known as the labyrinth. When the labyrinth becomes infected or swollen, this condition is called labyrinthitis. It is typically accompanied by vertigo and imbalance.

Upper respiratory infections and other viral infections, and, less commonly, bacterial infections, can lead to labyrinthitis.

Balance problems can also result from taking many medications. For example, some medicines, such as those that help lower blood pressure, can make a person feel dizzy.

Balance problems due to high blood pressure can be managed by eating less salt (less sodium), maintaining a healthy weight, and exercising. Balance problems due to low blood pressure may be managed by drinking plenty of fluids, such as water, avoiding alcohol, and being cautious regarding your body's posture and movement, such as standing up slowly and avoiding crossing your legs when you’re seated

Other balance disorders may involve another part of the body, such as the brain or the heart. For example, diseases of the circulatory system, such as stroke, can cause dizziness and other balance problems. Smoking and diabetes can increase the risk of stroke. Low blood pressure can also cause dizziness.

Check with your doctor if you notice a problem while taking a medication. Ask if other medications can be used instead. If not, ask if the dosage can be safely reduced. Sometimes it cannot. However, your doctor will help you get the medication you need while trying to reduce unwanted side effects.

Your diet and lifestyle can help you manage certain balance-related problems. Always check with your doctor before you stop or start any medication or begin any exercise program.

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