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## AUDIOLOGY Information Series

# What Is Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)?

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## This morning I woke up terrified because when I rolled over in bed, the world started spinning around me. What's wrong with me?

You are experiencing what is known as *vertigo*—a feeling of motion that patients usually describe as a spinning sensation. Vertigo is often a result of some problem affecting the balance system—also known as the *vestibular* system. The balance system is located within your ears and is responsible for sensing and monitoring your movement, as well as keeping your balance when standing still. A problem within your balance system may often lead to feelings of vertigo, dizziness, a loss of balance, and sometimes lightheadedness.

The symptoms that you are describing are typical of a specific type of vertigo known as benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, or BPPV. If you have BPPV, you are not alone. BPPV is the *single most common cause of vertigo and dizziness*, and affects more than 150,000 people each year. People suffering from BPPV will almost always report the same problems.

They live through vertigo:

- for a brief period of time, usually less than 30–60 seconds,
- whenever they get up from bed or roll over in bed,
- looking up into the sky or into a high cupboard,
- when they bend over to pick something up.

Brief episodes of vertigo, and experiencing vertigo following a change in head position, are usually reason enough for a physician or audiologist to suspect BPPV.

## Should I be worried?

Vertigo and dizziness are always something to be concerned about. The diagnosis of BPPV is a fairly simple one and can usually be made after performing a series of brief positioning tests in the office. If a diagnosis of BPPV is confirmed by your physician, *relax*. BPPV is

often easily and effectively treated within a few minutes right there in the office, without any drugs, needles, or surgery.

## What exactly is it, and how did I get it?

Don't let the words trouble you. Let's break it down:

- *Benign* means that it's NOT life threatening.
- *Paroxysmal* simply means short-lived or lasting only for a brief period of time, often seconds.
- *Positional* means that the dizziness is provoked by changes in certain head or body positions.
- *Vertigo* describes the *spinning* dizziness you feel. So, BPPV is simply describing your symptoms of a brief period of vertigo brought on when you move your head, or body, in a particular way or place it in a particular position.

## But how did I get it?

BPPV is often the result of some type of head trauma even a slight bump to the head or, swelling of the inner ear, aging. Unfortunately, though, the cause may be unknown in many cases.

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## Can it be treated?

BPPV is often easily and effectively treated. Your audiologist may perform a *head rolling maneuver*, also known as the Epley Maneuver. Many patients report an immediate improvement or a complete end to their dizziness after the maneuver has been done. Although it may take a follow-up visit to your doctor to repeat the maneuver, the success of the Epley Maneuver is appreciated by thousands of patients each year.

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One of the downsides of having BPPV is that those who develop it are more likely to get it again in the future. This happens for a variety of reasons, many of which you cannot control. Don't worry though—it usually can be treated effectively each time with the same head rolling procedure. But it is important to get your physician involved each time to make certain that nothing else is going on.

**I'm feeling much better about this whole "BPPV" thing now. Is there anything else I need to know?**

Absolutely. Although BPPV is known to be the single most common cause of dizziness, it is important to *seek the care of a physician whenever dizziness is experienced*—no matter how benign or slight the experience is. The exact diagnosis of BPPV should always come from your physician. Dizziness and/or vertigo can be caused by a myriad of things, and it is always a good idea to get it checked out by a doctor as soon as possible.

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For more information about hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact the:



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