

Blue Ridge Hearing and Balance Clinic

Our goal is to provide comprehensive evaluation and treatment for a variety of balance disorders, including vertigo, disequilibrium, imbalance, and unsteadiness. These symptoms can have many different causes and treatment varies depending on the source of the problem. While it is estimated that 85% of people complaining of vertigo (spinning sensation) have inner ear disorders, other types of balance problems may be the result of visual deficits, decreased sensation or strength in the legs, cardio-vascular disease, or a combination of some of the above. The evaluation process involves no pain or risk, but does typically require more than one visit to the center.

The first step in receiving help is to consult your family physician. Frequently, they can determine the cause of your balance problems and provide treatment. Your family doctor can help you determine whether you might be a candidate for the Balance Disorders Clinic. Additionally, they will provide us with important information about your medical background and a list of your current medications.

Typically, your initial appointment will include an examination and medical history review, and a series of screening exams to “classify” your type of dizziness. Based on these results, we will determine which exams are most likely to provide helpful information, and schedule you to return to do additional testing. In some cases, the initial screening will reveal the problem. If your symptoms and the screening tests indicate the likelihood that your complaints are not a result of an ear problem, we will refer you to the appropriate specialist, or refer you back to your primary care physician.

Preparing For Your Appointment

It is important that you keep your scheduled appointment. We block almost 2 hours of our schedule for this. If you must change your appointment, please do so at least 24 hours prior. Failure to keep or cancel your appointment in a timely manner may result in the inability to reschedule your appointment.

Prior to your initial appointment, you should have received or downloaded a questionnaire and registration form. Please fill these out **before** arriving for your appointment. Bring a list of all of your current medications and any medical records pertaining to your balance or dizziness (particularly reports of any reports of previous exams such as CT or MRI scans). You may take your medications, but eat lightly, before this initial appointment. Refrain from wearing excessive makeup, especially eye liner and mascara. Your initial visit usually takes about 2 ½ hours.

Your second appointment will typically involve a series of tests to determine the cause of your dizziness or balance complaints. A description of these tests follows. Certain medications can affect the sensitivity of these exams, so it is important to cease, if possible, the use of any medications used for dizziness, anxiety, depression, sleep, or nerves. Check with your doctor before ceasing any prescribed medication. It is **NOT** necessary to cease medications used for treating diabetes, blood pressure, and heart or lung disease. It is helpful if you come to this evaluation with a mostly empty stomach. Diabetics should eat a light meal. If your test results indicate that your complaints may be the result of a possible abnormality treated by an outside specialty (most frequently neurology or cardiology), we will refer you to the appropriate specialist.

Electrophysiologic Tests

A comprehensive battery of tests will be performed during your appointment. Prior to each test an explanation will be given so that you have a better understanding of what is being tested and why. These tests are designed to help us locate the source of your balance disorder. In each of these tests, we stimulate the balance centers of the inner ear or nerve pathway connecting the inner ear to the brain. We then record the response to the stimulus. These tests are safe and comfortable, no needles are used, but stimulation of the inner ear may make you temporarily dizzy.

ENG (Electronystagmography)/VNG (Videonystagmography)

Many inner ear disorders cause an involuntary movement of the eyes called nystagmus. This nystagmus can be recorded and analyzed through ENG/VNG testing. Stimulation of the inner ear for this test includes rapid position changes of the head and body, and caloric (temperature) stimulation of the inner ear through irrigating the ear canal with different temperatures of water or air. The goal is to determine if both inner ears are functioning and responding equally to the stimulation. Additionally, tests of voluntary eye movement serve as a screening for possible neurologic disorders.

VORTEQ/VAT (Vestibular Autorotation Testing)

So that we may maintain focus (or Gaze) on objects while moving our head, nature provides us with a Vestibular (inner ear)/Ocular (visual) Reflex. The impairment of this reflex action can cause imbalance or visual blurring with head movement. The VAT test determines if this reflex action is working properly at fast speeds of head movement.

Rotational Chair

Rotational chair testing allows us to stimulate the inner ear and avoid stimulating any other part of the balance system. It is a very sensitive test of inner ear abnormality. The patient is placed in a motorized chair and eye movements are recorded and analyzed.

ABR (Auditory Brainstem Response)

Balance problems can come from the inner ear or the nerve pathway between the inner ear and the brain. This test involves recording the transmission of sound traveling up the auditory nerve. Hearing and balance information travel the same nerve pathway. Results of this test can help us rule out the possibility of nerve degeneration or small auditory nerve tumors that may be affecting balance and/or hearing.

CDP (Computerized Dynamic Posturography)

Good balance depends on the efficient use of all balance information available. This test allows us to evaluate one's reaction to a variety of difficult balance situations. This is done by having the patient stand on a platform that measures center of gravity, and any sway from the center, while at the same time provoking them with conflicting balance information. By doing this, we can determine what type of situation is most likely to result in a fall. This information helps us design a customized therapy plan to enhance balance and minimize the risk of falling.

Appointments

At the completion of your evaluation, we will go over all of your test results, and discuss treatment options. Some balance problems can be treated quickly in one or two office visits; however, some require ongoing therapy that typically lasts for several weeks.

We want your visit with us to be as helpful and comfortable as possible, so please don't hesitate to ask any questions.