

MAIL TODAY

High to Tumble

(VERTIGO IS OFTEN
CONFUSED WITH A FEAR OF
HEIGHTS BUT IS ACTUALLY
A SPINNING SENSATION)

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LOVE MAKES the world go around, sings Madonna. But when love has nothing to do with the spinning sensation in your head, the world may not seem quite so rosy after all. Such a spinning sensation is referred to as vertigo, which is basically the sensation of whirling or swaying experienced by a person while she is actually stationary. This makes it difficult to maintain balance while standing or sitting.

The person suffering from vertigo usually feels giddy when he stands up after a deep sleep or changes his body positions. This sensation could be mild or severe enough to cause nausea and vomiting and can even lead to a complete blackout. While middle aged people are more commonly affected, there is no particular age group in which this manifests.

IT ORIGINATES IN THE EAR

Vertigo may be caused by problems in the brain or inner ear. One of the most common forms is Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) which happens when debris made up of calcium carbonate and protein (called otoliths or ear crystals) builds up and moves around the inner ear. When the head is moved in a certain manner — turning in bed, looking up or bending over — the calcium crystals move around and trigger inner ear sensors, causing a spinning sensation. "This condition arises due to a discrepancy in the balancing system of the ear and the nerve connecting it to the area of the brain that controls balance, posture and motor co-ordination. More precisely it is caused due to an imbalance of the fluid in the inner ear because of which movement information cannot be passed on to the brain," says Dr Chanchal Pal, ENT specialist, Moolchand Medicity.

Inflammation within the inner ear, commonly caused by a bacterial or viral infection may lead to the sudden onset of vertigo and even hearing loss. Vertigo can also be caused by a decrease in blood flow to the base of the brain and bleeding into the back of the brain following a stroke or haemorrhage. This can also cause a headache, difficulty in walking and an inability to look towards the side that is bleeding.

Inner ear degeneration which usually occurs in elderly patients, head trauma and tumors can also cause BPPV. Some medications and environmental chemicals like tin, mercury and lead can cause ear poisoning (ototoxicity) which results in damage to the inner ear and cause vertigo. The damage could be permanent or temporary.

Long term use of certain antibiotics (aminoglycosides) can cause permanent ear poisoning. One should also beware antidepressants, antihypertensives, quinine, pain relievers, prescription and over-the-counter cold medications all of which may cause temporary ear poisoning.

BLAME IT ON POSTURE

Vertigo could also be a result of bad posture. "This basically happens when the blood supply to brain gets disturbed because of pressure applied on or due to degenerative changes in the spine or disc problems or tight muscles because of stress and bad posture," says Dr Shaltee Jain, HOD, physiotherapy, Rockland hospital. Those people who have sedentary desk jobs involving a lot of computer usage are at increased risk of developing this problem. It is often accompanied by a stiff neck and headache, she adds.

This occurs more commonly in women since hormonal disturbances during pregnancy, premenstrual period and menopause may



cause neck pain and stiffness which can later lead to vertigo. Moreover household jobs such as cleaning, cooking, nursing etc can aggravate these symptoms.

Doctors say making ergonomic changes such as modifying workstations can be helpful in reducing the chances of recurrence. "If you are a computer professional then make sure that your monitor is at proper height. Moving your neck in all directions is important too," Dr Jain adds. In any case, it is important to be aware of the correct way of sitting, standing, sleeping and working. Too high or too flat pillows give strain to head and neck while sleeping so one should ensure that the neck is properly supported while sleeping.

Different treatments in the form of heat, local ultrasonic therapy and cervical traction are extremely helpful in relieving the tightness and spasm in the muscles. "Various manual therapy techniques are applied by the physiotherapist to reduce the pressure from the compressed artery and relieve the symptoms. Certain exercises are taught to the patients to maintain the effects. They are also guided about the posture correction

while sleeping, sitting and working," explains Dr Jain.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Often people tend to ignore the symptoms of dizziness, thinking it may be caused by either exhaustion or weakness. But when it occurs repeatedly and interferes with daily functioning, a consultation may be called for. "Diagnosis includes clinical history, physical and neurological examinations, blood tests and imaging scans like CT and MRI are done to rule out serious conditions like cardiovascular disease, stroke, haemorrhage or tumour," says Dr Rohit Bhatia, neurologist, AIMS.

Electronystagmography (ENG) is the neurological test to evaluate the condition of the inner ear. It involves testing hearing, eye movements and evaluating the patient's response to change in posture and position. Apart from medication, physiotherapy plays a great role in treating vertigo arising out of inner ear imbalance. Various exercises — Canalith repositioning manoeuvres, Semont manoeuvres and Epley manoeuvres — are done on patients.

"These exercises are done only by a trained physiotherapist and aim to change the position of the debris that gets stuck in the inner ears. They use the force of gravity to push these deposits out of the body through normal body fluids," says Dr Suruchi Malhotra, physiotherapist, Max Multispecialty. These manoeuvres help retrain the brain to avoid sensory mismatch that leads to problems of balance, increases balance and a person's tolerance of motion.

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SUMMER HEALTH CONCERNS

Summer raises a whole lot of health concerns, some of which are genuine. Here we address some of the most common ones:

Q: Are nose bleeds more common in summer?

A: A nosebleed is caused by rupture of the blood vessels in the nose, and occurs more often in hot and dry weather. Heat causes crusts to form in the nose that may itch and bleed when picked. Other reasons for this include nose picking, forceful nose-blowing, breathing hot or dry air, viral infections, head or nose injuries and high blood pressure. Nose bleeds also occur during winter when the dry and warm air (from heaters) inside homes dries out the nose, making it more susceptible to bleeding. To stop a

nosebleed, pinch the sides of the nose firmly and hold it for 10 minutes. You could also hold a cold compress over your nose.

Q: Can the heat cause my feet to swell?

A: Feet and ankles swell more during the summer than winter because we tend to move about more in warmer weather. This is generally caused by gravity drawing the fluid down to the muscles and causing them to swell. But swelling may also be a sign of a circulatory problem. Salty food also induces water retention. So don't be shocked if your dainty feet turn into tree trunks by dinner time.

Q: Can staying in the sun make my skin itch?

A: Exposure to sunlight can cause itchy lesions to develop on body parts exposed to the sun. This condition is called polymorphous light eruption (PMLE), the cause of which is unknown. Steroid ointments and creams are useful to relieve the itching and reduce inflammation. Oral steroids help to reduce the severity of the reaction. Staying in the shade or wearing an SPF 30 sun block may be useful too.

TIPS FOR THOSE WITH VERTIGO

- Use 2 pillows
- Avoid sleeping on the side of the body that induces giddiness
- Always get up and sit down slowly
- Avoid bending forward
- Be careful when you sit in a dentist's chair or have a shampoo at the parlour
- Drink lots of fluids

