

Understanding dizziness and your body



We often link our dizziness symptoms to a problem with our balance organs in our inner ear. However, dizziness symptoms can sometimes be related to our emotional state. Some examples of such symptoms include:

- vague, persistent sensations of dizziness
- frequent periods of rocking or swaying
- light headedness
- sweating
- trembling/shaking
- racing heart
- nausea.

Most people that experience dizziness and balance problems will at some stage experience unpleasant emotions such as:

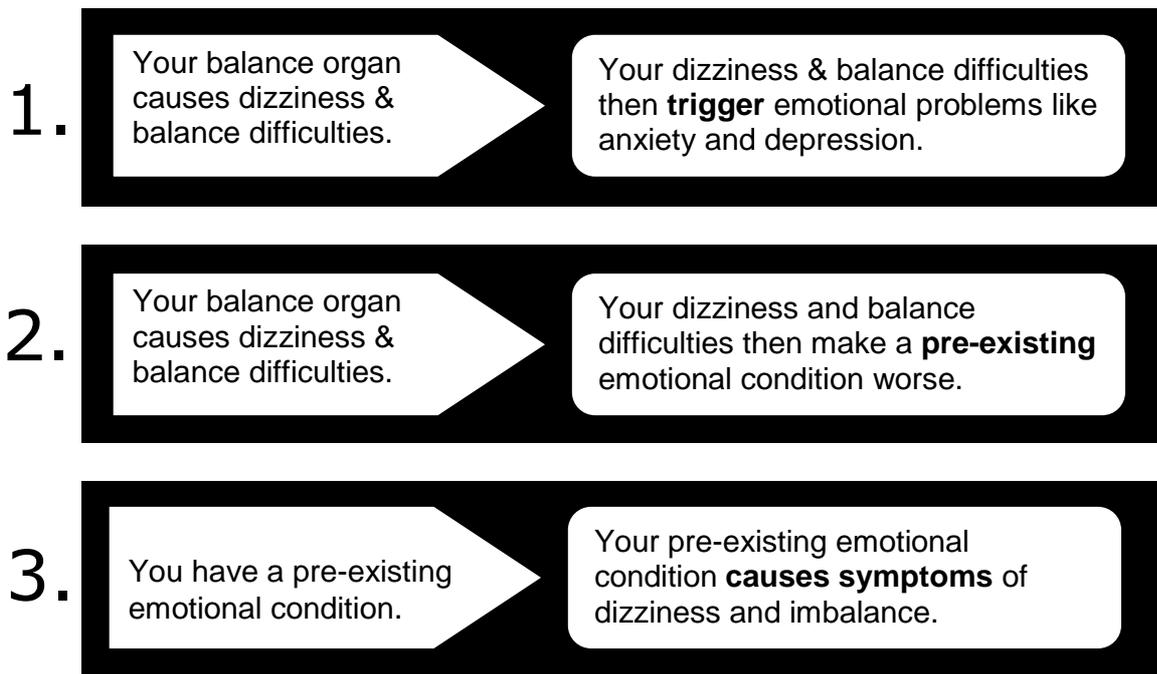
- fear
- panic
- anxiety
- embarrassment
- stress
- frustration
- anger.

For some people, these unpleasant emotions can become debilitating. In fact, studies have shown that about 25% of patients with chronic dizziness have been diagnosed with an emotional condition¹.

The most common emotional conditions for people with dizziness are anxiety and depression.



According to the research, there are three different ways that emotional problems can be linked to dizziness¹:



I'm not imagining my problem – it's real

Whether dizziness has caused emotional difficulties or emotional difficulties have caused dizziness, the dizziness is NOT imagined! The dizziness or balance difficulty is very real.

Most people experiencing dizziness and balance difficulties will also experience unpleasant and unhelpful emotions. It is important for you to recognise when you are experiencing unhelpful emotions because they may affect your recovery and ability to cope. The following checklist may help you identify if you are experiencing unhelpful emotions that may be related to your dizziness and balance difficulties:

- Do you feel tense most of the time?
- Do you worry about things?
- Do 'upsets' affect your sleep or appetite?
- Do you tend to think the worst things may happen in any stressful situation?
- When you worry do you tend to breathe quickly and does your heart start racing?
- Do you feel down-hearted and blue?
- Do you feel like you have nothing to look forward to?
- Do you feel like withdrawing from your family and friends?
- Do you feel like life is just too hard?



What can I do to reduce dizziness symptoms caused by emotional symptoms?

Breathe

During dizziness episodes sit down and make a conscious effort to take some slow, deep breaths. This may help you to relax until the episode passes. Developing new ways to deal with stress can also help prevent episodes.

Undergo the health tests recommended by your medical practitioner

Learning that the symptoms are not caused by a serious illness can help reduce stress. Balance problems are often complex and management input may be recommended from several related areas including neurology, otology, audiology, physiotherapy, and psychology. Consult with your family doctor and develop strategies for reducing stress in your life.

Remain active

Exercise can help your balance system (in your brain) correct for the unwanted dizziness symptoms. Research has also shown that exercise causes endorphins to be released into your body and this helps you to feel healthy and happy.

- Try regular exercise, such as walking.
- Tai Chi or Yoga classes can improve your balance.

Vestibular physiotherapy can help you 'habituate' to unwanted dizziness symptoms during a graded exercise programme. This specialised physiotherapy will also help improve your balance. You can obtain a list of vestibular physiotherapy services by calling us on 9929-8270.

Psychologist

A psychologist specialises in understanding the connection between emotional well-being and health issues like dizziness and balance problems. A psychologist can help you to develop ways to identify emotional symptoms that may be related to your health issues. If your General Practitioner refers you to see a psychologist you may be eligible for a number of subsidised or free sessions. Visit www.psychology.org.au for more information. You can locate a psychologist close to you by calling the Australian Psychological Society Referral Service on 1800 333 497 or emailing referral@psychology.org.au.

ⁱ (Staab & Ruckenstein, 2003)

