

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

What is BPPV?

BPPV is a sudden and brief spinning feeling known as *vertigo*. It is usually triggered by a change in your head or body position (for example, when you roll over in bed or turn your head quickly to one side). BPPV is the most common cause of vertigo.

BPPV stands for “benign paroxysmal positional vertigo.” To better understand BPPV, here are brief explanations of what each term in the acronym means:

- **Benign** means that it’s not life-threatening.
- **Paroxysmal** simply means short-lived or lasting only for a brief period—often seconds.
- **Positional** means that the vertigo is caused by changes in certain head or body positions.
- **Vertigo** describes the spinning sensation you feel.

Often, vertigo is a result of a problem affecting the balance system—also known as the *vestibular system*. The vestibular 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 lead to feelings of vertigo, dizziness, a loss of balance, and sometimes lightheadedness. These feelings could be BPPV or something else.

What are the signs of BPPV?

If you have BPPV, you may have vertigo that lasts 30–60 seconds. This happens when you

- get up from or roll over in bed,
- look up into the sky or to a high shelf, or
- pick something up from off the floor.

How is BPPV diagnosed?

If you have feelings of vertigo, you should consult with a physician or an audiologist. The diagnosis of BPPV can usually be made after performing a series of head and body positioning tests in the doctor’s office. During your evaluation for BPPV, the doctor or audiologist will monitor your eye movements while placing you in different positions on an exam table. If a diagnosis of BPPV is confirmed, it is often safely treated within a few minutes right there in the office.

How is BPPV treated?

Your audiologist or physician may perform a head rolling maneuver, known as the Epley maneuver. Many patients report an immediate improvement or a complete end to their vertigo after the maneuver has been done. Research on BPPV has shown that the Epley maneuver is successful in improving or curing BPPV in 90% of cases within one to three treatments.



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How did I get BPPV?

About half of BPPV cases have no specific cause (known as *idiopathic BPPV*). Common causes of BPPV are

- head injury;
- history of ear surgery;
- Ménière's disease (for more information: [Evaluation and Management of Ménière's Disease](#));
- migraine headaches;
- viruses of the inner ear; and
- aging.

What else should I know about BPPV?

It is important to know that BPPV does not cause constant vertigo. It will NOT affect your hearing or produce fainting, headache, or neurological symptoms. If you are experiencing sensations such as numbness, tingling sensations, trouble speaking, or trouble coordinating your movements, seek medical attention immediately.

Notes:

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Although BPPV is recognized as the single most common cause of vertigo, it is important to seek the care of a physician whenever you experience vertigo. Overall, vertigo can be caused by many medical issues, and it is always a good idea to have a doctor evaluate it as soon as possible.

Lastly, consult with an audiologist for assistance and be sure to ask the audiologist any questions related to hearing and dizziness that you have. [Find a certified audiologist on ASHA ProFind online directory.](#)

For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

2200 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850
800-638-8255

Email: audiology@asha.org
Website: www.asha.org

Compliments of

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
2200 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850 * 800-638-8255