

Vestibular Rehabilitation: Lifestyle Changes

Long wait times to access medical care can be stressful, so we wanted to provide you with some information that can help you begin the healing process now. We know that anxiety, stress, lack of sleep, too much caffeine or sugar, poor hydration, and lack of physical activity can limit your progress toward recovery from inner ear issues, including dizziness and tinnitus (ringing in your ears). However, many people find that simple lifestyle changes can help them feel better.

Because of this, we are asking you to make lifestyle changes focused on sleep, diet, and stress starting today. We know it may be hard to make several changes at once, so it may be best for you to focus on just 1-2 areas at a time. We also included some tips for managing dizziness and tinnitus.

How can I manage dizziness?

- It is natural to want to avoid movement when you are dizzy. However, limiting movement or activity can also cause muscle stiffness, neck pain, headache, and overall fatigue (tiredness). Your energy level may decrease, and you may have trouble relaxing. It's important to know that movement can actually help heal you! By slowly increasing your movement and activity, your brain will make up for (or compensate for) an inner ear problem.
- When you have dizziness, some things that can help include taking a deep breath, relaxing your shoulders, and grounding yourself through your feet for a few minutes.
- We recommend that you rate your dizziness on a 10-point scale to help you control the intensity of your dizziness during activities.

- It is okay to do activities that bring on mild to moderate dizziness, (so up to a 4-6 level).
- Any feelings of dizziness or nausea should return to your baseline (normal) level within a few minutes of stopping the activity.
- If you experience higher intensity dizziness, or if your dizziness continues for more than a few minutes after stopping the activity, you can make one of these changes the next time you do the activity:
 - Decrease the speed of the activity.
 - Do the activity with less motion.
 - Decrease the number of times you repeat the activity.
- While movement will help you heal, it is important to balance your day with activity and rest periods.

Dizziness Intensity Scale	
0 = No dizziness	
1] Mild
2	
3	
4] Moderate
5	
6	
7] Moderate-Severe
8	
9	
10 = Severe dizziness	

How can I manage tinnitus?

- Being in a rich sound environment can help you notice your tinnitus less. Consider different ways you can add soft volume background sound, such as:
 - Playing music
 - Fan noise
 - Smartphone sound generator apps, such as the Resound Tinnitus Relief app (resound.com/en-gb/hearing-aids/apps/relief) or the Widex Zen app (widexpro.com/en-us/business-support/tinnitus-solutions)
- The goal is to blend your tinnitus with other sounds so that it is less noticeable, but not to cover it up completely. Find your “mixing point” by

making sure you can still hear your tinnitus when using other masking sounds.

- For more information on managing tinnitus, read this online handout: vestibular.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Tinnitus-Coping-Strategies_108.pdf

What are some lifestyle changes I can make to feel better?

Get good sleep

- Try to get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night.
- Go to bed and get up around the same time each day.
- Avoid screen time (looking at your phone or computer screen) 1 hour before bedtime.
- Do guided meditation, breathing exercises, or sound therapy to help you relax before bedtime.

Follow healthy eating and drinking habits

- Limit coffee, tea, and soft drinks to no more than 8 ounces (oz) each day.
- Avoid drinking or eating anything with caffeine after noon (12:00 PM) so it does not affect your sleep.
- Avoid alcohol, as it can have a bad effect on your inner ear fluid.
- Drink 48-64 oz of water each day to stay well hydrated. This is about a half gallon, or 3-4 standard size bottles of water.
- Eat 4-5 smaller healthy meals each day which include vegetables, fruits, and protein. This may include foods like Greek yogurt, beans, hummus, eggs, fish, or chicken.
- Avoid eating and drinking too much sugar or salt.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners like aspartame.
- If you have issues with nausea:

- Eat small, frequent, bland meals, like the BRAT diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast).
- Try drinking ginger or peppermint tea.
- If you start to feel nauseous, try placing a cold pack on the back of your neck for 10 minutes.

Get daily exercise

- We recommend doing a daily walking program. Have a family or friend join you so you can focus on staying relaxed.
 - Start by walking 5-10 minutes twice per day, and slowly increase to walking 20-30 minutes every day as you're able.
 - Set small goals that work for you. Keep a walking log to record when and how long you walk.
 - As you become more comfortable walking, be sure to look around and move your head during your walks.

Understand and manage your medications

- Talk with your doctor to get a better understanding of the purpose of each of the medications you are taking.
- Avoid taking meclizine (also known as Dramamine®, Antivert®, or Bonine®), which can limit your ability to heal.






Limit or quit smoking

Treatments for dizziness and tinnitus are less effective for active smokers. If you are a smoker, we recommend that you try to limit your smoking or quit smoking.

Manage feelings of stress and anxiety

- Ask for and accept help when you need it.

- Try deep breathing exercises, grounding, or other relaxation techniques to help keep your anxiety under control.
- Seek out social support from professionals, family, and friends.
- Think about joining a support group or working with a psychologist or counselor.

Online resources for managing stress and anxiety	
<p>“Calm Breathing” handout from the UM Depression Center: UMMentalHealth.info/toolkit-download/pdf/CalmBreathing.pdf</p>	
<p>“Relaxation Techniques” handout from TherapistAid.com: TherapistAid.com/worksheets/relaxation-techniques</p>	
<p>“Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)” handout from the UM Depression Center: UMMentalHealth.info/toolkit-download/pdf/CognitiveBehavioralTherapyCBT.pdf</p>	
<p>Find a therapist or social worker through Psychology Today: PsychologyToday.com/us</p>	
<p>Find a support group through the Vestibular Disorders Association: Vestibular.org/article/coping-support/support-groups</p>	

Be patient with yourself as you make small changes

- Keep in mind that it takes time to build up new habits. Some days you may not feel as motivated to work on improving your lifestyle behaviors as others. That is part of the normal process of forming new habits.
- Try to make a small goal each week for each of the lifestyle change areas mentioned above. For example, if your goal is to drink 4 bottles of water a day, you could start with the smaller goal of drinking 2 or 3 bottles of water a day.
- Remember that it also takes time to notice decreased symptoms after you begin improving your lifestyle behaviors. Do your best to stay focused on the plan!

We hope that once you notice the benefits of the changes, you will continue to maintain good lifestyle behaviors for a lifetime!

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