



COURTESY PHOTO

Jeff Donatello of York Chiropractic Health Center in Kittery, Maine, does the Epley Maneuver on patient Tori McNulty.

FEELING DIZZY

■ *Aging process affects balance but do you know about ear rocks, depleted jing and the Epley Maneuver?*

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Being a dizzy dame might have been a compliment of sorts in a 1940 movie, but for those over 50 it's a concern. The apparent minor affliction that occurs more frequently with age can be just that — minor.

Each year more than 2 million people will visit an allopathic doctor for dizziness and vertigo with more seeking help from other modalities. According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck

Surgery (AAO-HNS) dizziness is a balance problem. Officially known as disequilibrium, it's a sense of being light-headed, unsteady, or giddy, without a sensation of turning or spinning. Vertigo on the other hand is the sensation of turning. Both can occur at any age, but tend to increase after 50. And both are most often related to an inner ear problem. But for some people it's a warning sign that should prompt a call for a check up.

The sense of balance and equilibrium is maintained by a complex interaction

of parts within the nervous system: the inner ear, the eyes, skin pressure receptor (including joints and spine), muscle and joint sensory receptor and the central nervous system. Things tend to go haywire when conflicting messages are received from the systems.

It's really a complicated issue, says Dr. Edmond Yeganeh, an otolaryngology specialist (eyes, ears, nose and throat).

"Basically the aging process affects the balance system."

In addition to issues with circulation, blood supply and the muscular and balance systems it can be caused by a "lack of sleep, recovering from an illness or use of a

DIZZY: Is it vertigo or dizziness?

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medication." It can also be brought on by pressure on the neck, perhaps caused by arthritis or an abnormal anatomy.

Any of those sources can bring about that loss of balance when changing position, whether rolling from side to side in bed or standing up quickly, or "they can be transient things," cautions Yeganeh.

Both dizziness and vertigo can leave a person less coordinated. The most common problem for either is falling.

When should you consult a doctor?

"If it is happening repeatedly, more than once or twice and doesn't clear up immediately. And if it is associated with other symptoms: blurring vision, nausea, vomiting ... headaches, ringing in the ears and pressure in the ears, this kind of thing," says Yeganeh.

Any of these can be an indicator of more than an inner ear problem.

One of the more common reasons for vertigo or dizziness is otoconia, a benign condition called ear rocks. It affects the inner ear where there is a fluid and hair cells that essentially "tell us our position in space," explains Yeganeh.

The basic premise is that the rocks are normal calcium particles found in the ear that break free and float into the ear's semicircular canal. There they throw off balance and cause vertigo. It can be caused by aging, medications,

illness or head injury.

In allopathic medicine it's often corrected with physical therapy, "a special rehab exercise that gradually eliminates this feeling," explains Yeganeh. The exercise may be overseen at an office and later continued at home.

Jeff Donatello of York Chiropractic Health Center in Kittery, Maine, treats the benign, common "ear rocks" with the Epley Maneuver. "I have been utilizing positional techniques (Epley Maneuver) for about one year now with great results. This is not a chiropractic technique. ... I learned it at a seminar last year." The no-drug or surgery technique is highly effective, he says.

The technique is simply a matter of turning the head to the side while in supine position, and moving the whole body in the opposite direction. The move is repeated with resting points in between. It can result in instantaneous decrease in symptoms for some, he says.

While very careful to explain chiropractors do not treat certain vertigo/dizziness conditions, there are those it can help, using more traditional chiropractic methods. One simple one is helping people reposition their head posture. When the body's alignment has the head thrust forward it can put a lot of stress on the upper neck, he explains. "Over time using a traction technique we can help pull it back and basically (improve) the posture ... which means less stress on the delicate nerves of the neck."

Uri Belopolsky of Family Acupuncture & Holistic Medicine in Kittery, Maine, practices Chinese medicine. This system has its own take on the condition.

"Dizziness in general may be

related to different conditions, according to Chinese medicine. It may be it is a deficiency of blood ... similar to anemia." According to Chinese medicine at the time this deficiency is indicated by dizziness it is generally years before anemia shows on Eastern medicine's usual tests. Those tests usually indicate a chronic condition.

There are other causes for dizziness and vertigo. It could be the outcome of an inner phlegm stagnation of the stomach and spleen/pancreas, an inner heat created by the liver. It can also be brought on by depletion of jing, a condition that has no Western medicine equivalent.

"It's our source of special energy carried through life. When you use it up, you're dead. With age, we have low jing levels, particularly if we're overtired, work too much, (engage in) excessive sex, or have chronic illness, or eat wrong foods as well, it leaves us low." The depletion is most commonly found among the elderly he adds.

As it is with Western medicine it must first be determined if it's vertigo or dizziness. Treatments vary by cause.

For the common ear stones the approach is much different than allopathic and chiropractic. "The basic reason (the stone is moving) is because the body is weaker and can not compensate with what's going on with the inner ear," says Belopolsky. "Instead of looking inside of the ear, we will build up the strength of the body (jing) and it will go away."

Bottom line, if your balance is regularly affected, it's wise to get it checked out. It could be a minor case of rocks in your head, or something more sinister. Best to take the plunge, before you take a fall.

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