

Why do we screen older patients for signs of a balance problem?

First, don't be alarmed if your balance score is abnormal for a person of your age. Balance problems can be caused by such common things as a cold or flu, lack of sleep, the effects of medications or even too much caffeine. In those cases the problem will usually resolve itself without any medical intervention.

But balance problems and dizziness can also be the first sign of serious health problems such as brain tumors, anemia, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, strokes, high blood pressure, traumatic injuries and many, many others. That's why identifying patients with abnormal balance can be invaluable in the detection of other serious conditions.

There's also another reason. The simple CAPSTTM balance test you will be given helps your physician identify patients who may be at an increased risk of falling. In older patients, falls can result in broken hips, other fractures, head trauma and other serious injuries, even death. That's why the Clinical Practice Guideline recommends the routine screening of all older persons.

So if your screening reveals signs of a balance disorder, and if the reason is not immediately apparent, your physician will want to find out why. **But please keep in mind that balance disorders are almost always caused by some benign, easily treatable condition.**

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provide this brochure
as a service to patients
and their families**

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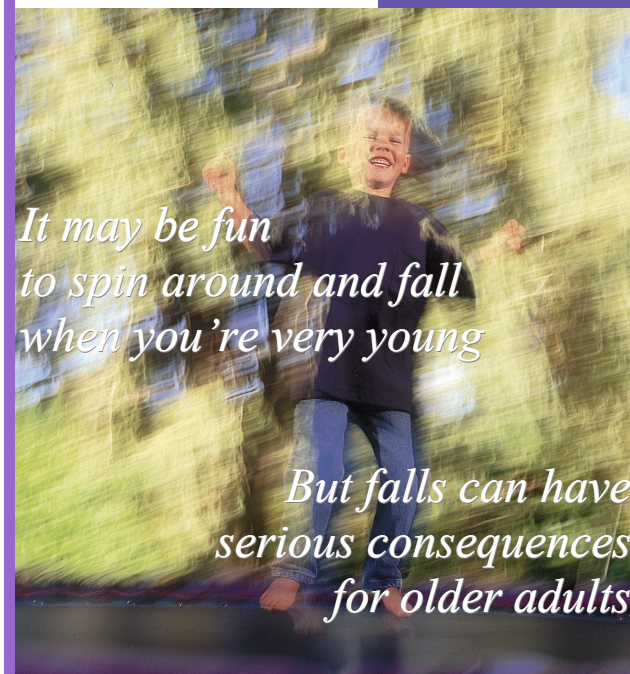
**This brochure is not meant to provide you with
medical advice. Only a licensed physician is qualified
to provide you with medical advice.**

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*It may be fun
to spin around and fall
when you're very young*

*But falls can have
serious consequences
for older adults*

**Because we care about our
patients, we follow the new
Clinical Practice Guideline
that recommends we screen
all patients age 55 and over
for risk of falling.**

**We do not charge for the
screening, which takes
less than one minute.**



HELPING PEOPLE REGAIN THEIR BALANCE ... FOR LIFE®

If my physician thinks I may have a balance problem, what can I expect to happen next?

As with any medical condition, you will need to receive certain recognized tests and evaluations to help your physician diagnose what is causing your balance problem.

Because the human balance system is so complex, many doctors use the recommended “multi-disciplinary approach” to the diagnosis of balance disorders, and a team of medical professionals with different clinical expertise (your physician, his/her staff, a physical therapist and a hearing professional) will work together to find out what is causing your balance problem.

The physical evaluation

Your physician will refer you to a physical therapist for an evaluation that will include checking your reflexes, sensation, muscle strength/tone, coordination, gait, stance, etc.

Many elderly patients have balance problems because of lower extremity muscle weakness. Additional contributing factors might be poor muscle coordination or other physical problems that the physical therapist is especially qualified to identify.

The audiometric testing

Because balance disorders are often the result of a problem with the vestibular system, which is located in your inner ear, and because a condition that involves your ears may cause hearing loss and also damage to your vestibular system, your physician will order certain audiometric tests.

Those tests will include a hearing test to check your ability to hear certain sounds, testing your hearing at low, mid-range and high frequencies, as well as checking the status of your middle ear and your ability to respond to sound at different levels.

The hearing professional will also look for signs of nystagmus, a rapid, jerky movement of the eyes that may indicate the presence of a balance disorder.

A “focused” medical history will also be obtained, one designed to secure the information needed for an accurate diagnosis in cases of dizziness and balance disorders.

Then what?

After you have been seen by the physical therapist and the hearing professional and they have provided your physician with the results of their evaluation and your history, you will be seen by your physician for a “problem-focused” visit.

The problem focused visit

At your problem focused visit, your physician will focus on the possible reason for your balance problem. First, your balance will be re-checked and your visual acuity will be checked. Then the results of your tests, your physical evaluation and the information revealed by your focused history will be carefully considered.

Your physician may also do another physical examination and ask you additional questions about your balance problem and any symptoms you have.

Your physician may then order additional tests such as an ENG (a painless test that measures eye movements) or may refer you to a specialist (an ENT, neurologist, cardiovascular specialist, etc.).

Your physician might also decide to treat the problem with medications, or he/she might decide to refer you for physical therapy at this point.

If additional tests are ordered, or if you are referred to a specialist, you will then need to be seen by your physician again so that he/she can make a diagnosis and decide on the proper treatment plan.

If you receive therapy, as most balance patients do, your physician will probably see you at least once more to review and measure your progress or results.