

News Column for Week of February 28, 2022

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### Is Vertigo Contributing to Your Fall Risk?

Falling is a concern for anyone. However, as we age, falls may happen more frequently, and as my grandfather used to say, “we just don’t bounce as well as we used too.”

Several factors may contribute to the more frequent falls, such as medications, chronic disease, vision or hearing loss, loss of strength, foot problems, and sometimes we just don’t pick up our feet as well as we should. Keeping physically active and doing strengthening exercises on a regular basis can reduce our risk for falls. If balance is an issue for us, we are likely not to keep up with the physical activity needed to help reduce the fall risk.

Vertigo is a common falls risk that creates a sensation of dizziness that leads to balance problems and ultimately makes a person a higher risk for falls. Nearly 40% of Americans experience vertigo sometime during their lifetime. It can happen at any age, but is more common in people over 65. Women may experience vertigo more often than men. It can also be a side effect of pregnancy.

Dizziness is more of an overall feeling of being unbalanced. For those experiencing vertigo, it can feel like they are moving and the environment around them is spinning in circles. Some compare vertigo to motion sickness, as they are feeling as if they are spinning or tilting.

Vertigo is not considered a disease. It can be scary, but is not considered serious. However, it may be a symptom of other serious health conditions. It is important to visit with your health care provider when experiencing recurring vertigo attacks. Tests can be performed to more correctly pinpoint the cause.

Most common instances of vertigo are related with hearing and the ear -- particularly a problem within the inner ear, known as peripheral vertigo. The inner ear is associated with helping us keep better balance. However, there is also central vertigo that occurs when there is an issue with the brain. Causes for this version of vertigo can include infection, brain tumors, traumatic brain injury or stroke.

Vertigo attacks may last several seconds to minutes. In severe cases, those spells may be experienced for several hours, days, weeks or even months.

In many cases, vertigo goes away on its own. There are also several treatments that may successfully manage vertigo. Medications may be needed to treat an infection or relieve nausea or the sensation of motion sickness.

Taking extra time to stand, turn your head, or rolling over in bed may help reduce your risk for vertigo. Other steps in reducing risk include sleeping with your head elevated, sitting down as soon you feel dizzy, or squatting instead of bending over to pick something up.

Don't let vertigo contribute to your risk for falls. Identifying the root cause of your vertigo can be determined by your health care provider and a personalized treatment option may be established to help you get back to a normal life.

There are some specific exercises that can be done to help improve balance. For more information on those exercises, contact your local Southwind Extension District Office.

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