



# Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

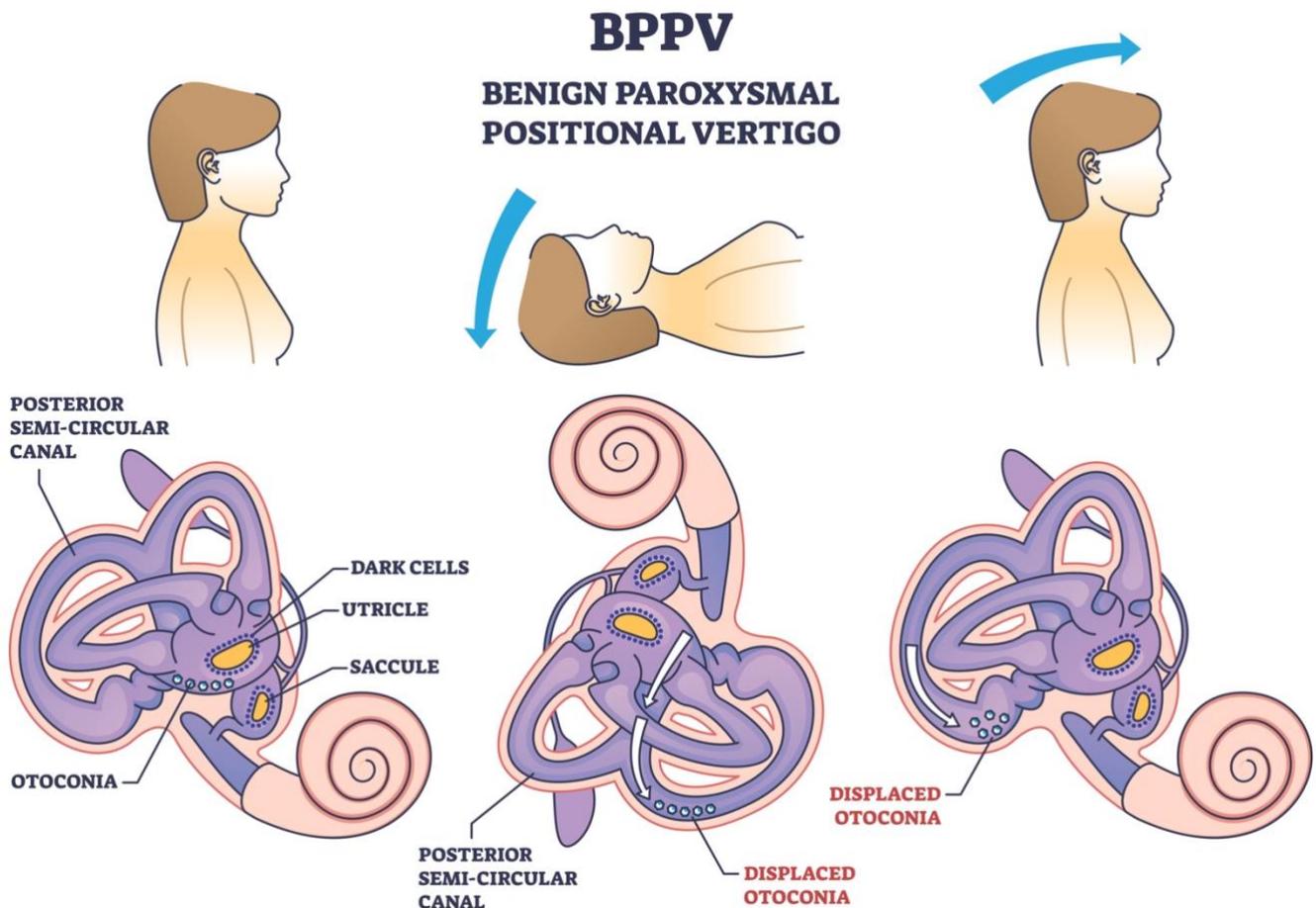
## What is BPPV?

BPPV is the most common inner ear problem and cause of vertigo (a false sense of spinning). BPPV is a specific diagnosis, and each word describes the condition.

**Benign:** this means it is not life-threatening, even though the symptoms can be intense and upsetting

**Paroxysmal:** it comes in sudden, short spells  
**Positional:** certain head positions or movements can trigger a spell

**Vertigo:** feeling like you are spinning, or the world is spinning



## **What are the symptoms of BPPV?**

These are the most common symptoms of BPPV:

- Vertigo/dizziness
- Nausea/vomiting
- A loss of balance or unsteadiness
- Possibly headaches in some patients but this is very minor

Many people tend to prevent any head movement such as bending down, turning their head etc to prevent triggering their dizziness.

## **What causes BPPV?**

BPPV occurs when tiny chalk like crystals (otoconia) embedded within our inner ear become free, move around and then get “stuck” in one of the canals in the inner ear balance system. As you roll over or tilt your head, movement of these “crystals” sends abnormal messages to the brain and eyes, causing spinning or dizziness. When you keep your head still symptoms settle within a minute.

## **How is BPPV diagnosed?**

Diagnosing BPPV involves taking a detailed history of a person’s health. The doctor confirms the diagnosis by observing nystagmus — jerking of the person’s eyes that accompanies the vertigo caused by changing head position. This is accomplished through a diagnostic test called the Dix-Hallpike manoeuvre.

## **What caused my BPPV?**

Most cases of BPPV happen for no reason. BPPV can sometimes be associated with head trauma, osteoporosis, other inner ear problems, diabetes, migraine, high blood pressure, dental surgery or lying in bed for long periods of time (preferred sleep side, surgical procedures, and illness)

## **How is BPPV treated?**

BPPV is treated by undertaking an “Epley Manoeuvre”.

An Epley Manoeuvre is a simple treatment where you will be asked you to lie down with your head hanging slightly over the edge of the bed. Your head will be supported by the clinician and will be moved slowly from the left to right or right to left (depending on which ear is affected) stopping at 3 positions. Your head is kept in each position for 60 seconds. This will help the crystals move back into the part of your ear where they have come from.

The manoeuvre may need to be performed more than once.

## What happens after diagnosis and treatment?

This is not a life-threatening condition although the symptoms can be very disabling. People may experience other problems with it like imbalance and anxiety. Treatments are very successful and, in most patients, will go away within 1-3 treatments. Occasionally people vomit after treatment and a small number of people may feel woozy or more off balance for a few days after treatment. This usually goes away on its own. It may be useful to have someone else drive you home or take a taxi after treatment. For the first 24-48 hours after treatment, you may be advised to avoid lying flat in bed, look up i.e. into cupboards or at the sky or down i.e. to tie your laces or pick up a bag. After this time, you can continue as you normally would. Continuing your usual routine and moving around normally will help your balance system recover. If the symptoms don't improve or they return, treatment is repeated. It is important to go back to see your clinician. It is also possible to complete these manoeuvres at home, but you should discuss this first.

## Is there any downside to BPPV repositioning treatment?

Following the treatment some patients report their symptoms start to clear right away and others report that they have continuing motion sickness type symptoms and mild instability. These symptoms can take a few hours or few days to go away.

## Can BPPV come back and/or can I prevent it?

Unfortunately, BPPV is a condition that can sometimes return. You may only ever have a few episodes, or they may become more frequent, often caused by factors such as physical injury, inner ear conditions or aging. BPPV cannot be prevented from coming back but can be treated again with the same manoeuvre.

### Useful Links

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/benign-paroxysmal-positional-vertigo-bppv>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/vertigo/symptoms-causes/syc-20370055>

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact The Balance Team Secretary: 0121 424 3154

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