

# Dizziness

Category: 2 Symptom

## Types of dizziness



There are two types of dizziness that you might experience following a COVID-19 infection. These are:

1. **Vertigo** is the feeling that you or your surroundings are moving when there is no actual movement. Sometimes this can feel like you are off balance or tilting. In severe cases, you may have nausea, vomiting, and difficulty walking.
2. **Lightheadedness** is the feeling that you are going to faint. In severe cases, you may have nausea, vomiting, and/or have a fainting episode (syncope).

## Causes of vertigo

Vertigo is often due to a problem with your inner ear and/or the part of your brain that helps you balance. Some common causes of vertigo after COVID-19 include:

- **Migraines:** These can get worse after COVID-19. There is a type of migraine called a 'vestibular migraine' in which a migraine headache is accompanied by vertigo.
- **Vestibular neuritis or labyrinthitis:** These involve inflammation of the inner ear which can occur from a viral infection like COVID-19. It results in episodes of the 'room spinning' sensation.
- **Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV):** This is a common cause of vertigo caused by tiny calcium stones in your inner ear. It results in short episodes of the 'room spinning' sensation that are usually triggered by head movements to one direction.
- **Persistent postural perceptual dizziness (PPPD):** This is a condition in which patients experience persistent dizziness for over 3 months. It is often triggered by vestibular neuritis, labyrinthitis, or BPPV. However, it does not involve the 'room spinning' sensation and it is believed to be due to a problem processing visual information. Patients with PPPD experience a sensation of dizziness and feeling off balance that can get worse by changing position, standing up, or looking at complex visual stimuli (such as looking at a computer screen). This is a relatively newly described condition and not all doctors and other health professionals are familiar with it.
- **Medications**
- **Alcohol**

## Causes of lightheadedness

There are many different causes of **lightheadedness**. Some common causes of lightheadedness after COVID-19 include:

- Dehydration from not drinking enough or from vomiting or diarrhea
- Low blood pressure from not eating and drinking enough or from blood pressure medications
- Low blood sugar from not eating enough or some diabetes medications
- Standing up quickly after lying down
- Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) – Some patients experience this with their Long COVID.
- Anxiety and stress
- Low iron or anemia
- Some medications

## When to seek medical help for dizziness

It's never a bad idea to talk to a medical professional about your **dizziness**. In particular, you should seek medical help if:

- Your dizziness is accompanied by nausea or vomiting that persists or increases
- Fainting occurs
- Your symptoms become more severe or frequent
- Your dizziness is accompanied by chest pain, palpitations, or shortness of breath
- Your dizziness is accompanied by other neurological symptoms like double vision, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, or weakness in the body
- You have an underlying heart condition
- You have a family history of heart disease
- Your dizziness started after starting a new medication
- Your dizziness is making it difficult for you to complete your daily activities

## What to discuss with a doctor

Sometimes it is difficult for patients to explain their **dizziness** to a doctor. When you talk to a doctor, try your best to provide details to help them determine the cause of your dizziness.

The doctor may ask the following **questions**:

- Does the dizziness feel more like **vertigo** ('room spinning' and/or 'feeling off balance') or **lightheadedness** ('feeling like you are about to faint')?
- What **causes** the dizziness to come on (for example, standing up quickly, moving your head, looking at a computer, etc.)?
- Do you have any **other symptoms** with your dizziness?
  - Symptoms that could be related to your ears, such as tinnitus (ringing of your ears) or hearing difficulty
  - Symptoms that could be related to your heart such as chest pain or palpitations
  - Symptoms that could be related to your brain like headaches, difficulty with speech, double vision, or weakness

If you have a **blood pressure monitor** at home, it can be helpful to check your blood pressure during times when you are feeling dizzy. Write this down and talk to your doctor about it.

Similarly, if you take medication for **diabetes** (especially if you take insulin), you can check your blood sugar when you experience dizziness.

You may also want to ask your doctor if they think that further **tests** for your heart are required. This may include:

- Electrocardiogram (also called EKG or ECG) – it takes a 'snapshot' of your heart's electrical pattern

- 24-hour Holter monitor – it's a device that you wear that keeps track of your heart's electrical pattern for 24 hours
- Blood work to check your blood counts and ferritin (a measure of your iron stores)

## Home treatment for vertigo

**Vertigo** can sometimes be treated with special exercises or vestibular physiotherapy. Ask your doctor about these.

Dimenhydrinate (brand name Gravol or Dramamine) is an over the counter medication that may be helpful for vertigo and nausea. Be careful when taking this, as it can cause drowsiness and make it unsafe to drive and operate heavy machinery.

Usually, these causes are not serious and can be treated. However, in some cases, lightheadedness can be related to a more serious condition like an underlying heart problem or severe infection.

## Home prevention and treatment for lightheadedness

Here are some strategies that can help prevent and reduce the severity of **lightheadedness**:

- Get up slowly after lying down – for example, you can sit for a while before getting up on your two feet.
- Eat and drink regularly throughout the day.
- Limit the amount of time you spend lying down during the day.
- Try to be active (as much as you can within your energy envelope), even if it means going for a short walk or doing some gentle movements – this can promote blood flow, help maintain muscle mass, and help your body deal with lightheadedness.
- Reduce your caffeine and alcohol consumption – this can cause your blood vessels to widen and lower your blood pressure.
- Reduce your screen time, especially if you have PPPD – your symptoms can get worse when you are exposed to a lot of visual stimuli.
- Increase your salt intake – this can be helpful for Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) and prevent drops in your blood pressure. However, talk to a doctor first as this is not always safe for people with high blood pressure, heart disease, or kidney disease.

Wear compression stockings – you can buy these from the pharmacy and a doctor may be able to provide you with a prescription. Talk to a doctor first before using these if you have had problems with blood flow in your legs (peripheral arterial disease).