**Vestibular Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT)**

The vestibular system is located in your inner ear. It is made up of the vestibular nerve, three semi-circular canals, and two other organs (utricule and saccule) that sense movement and change in position of your head. Your vestibular system sends information regarding head position and movement to your brain. Your visual and somatosensory systems, also send input to the brain regarding balance and position. Your brain incorporates input from these three systems, then sends signals to your body to maintain balance and posture.

When there is a problem in the vestibular system, your brain gets mixed signals and is unable to provide your body with the proper feedback. This can result in many of the common symptoms of vestibular disorders, including: impaired balance, dizziness or vertigo, motion sensitivity, difficulty walking, difficulty concentrating, and difficulty seeing while moving your head. It is estimated that at least half of the overall United States population is affected by a balance or vestibular disorder sometime during their lives.

The role of vestibular rehabilitation therapy is to improve the brain’s ability to provide the body with the proper feedback through balance training and head/eye movement exercises (compensation). During the VRT process, you will meet with a skilled therapist, who will perform a thorough assessment of your mobility, posture, balance, walking, and vision and obtain a detailed history of your problems, to determine your specific limitations. During the evaluation process, the therapist will use a computerized dynamic posturography device called the Smart Balance Master. It allows the therapist to perform a variety of tests and measures to assess how well you are able to keep your balance under different conditions. You will stand on a platform that will record your movements. The platform has walls on both sides and in front. Both the walls and the platform will move to provide different sensations. You will be supported by a safety harness to prevent you from falling. The therapist may also test your ability to see clearly while moving your head using a computerized head-mounted sensor called the In-Vision. This information can be used to better understand your specific balance issues and develop an effective and efficient therapy program.

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An individualized therapy program will be prescribed based upon the results of the assessment. It is important to realize that some of the exercises prescribed will initially make you dizzy. This is necessary to facilitate the compensation process. The therapy program may consist of balance exercises, head and eye movement exercises, and repeated position changes. Emphasis is also placed on developing a regular exercise program which will speed up the rehabilitation process and maintain the improvements that you make once the therapy has ended. VRT can help to improve balance, decrease dizziness, and improve the ability to see clearly with head movements. Numerous studies have shown it to be effective in the treatment and management of dizziness and imbalance associated with vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis, acoustic neuroma, BPPV, Meniere’s Disease, vestibular migraines, and motion sensitivity.

Below is a list of helpful websites targeted towards people with dizziness and balance issues.

1) Vestibular Disorders Association: www.vestibular.org
2) Information about dizziness, balance and hearing: www.dizziness-and-balance.com