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Common Vertigo has Quick Cure, Neurologists Say

(ARA) – Do you ever feel dizzy or lightheaded and have no idea why? The problem could be caused by a common condition called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV). For sufferers, there is now a simple solution.

The best treatment for vertigo is also the easiest and quickest one – simple manipulation of the head and body by your doctor or a qualified therapist, according to a new guideline from the American Academy of Neurology (AAN).

Up to 3 percent of Americans – more than 9.1 million people - will likely experience benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) at some point in their lives, says Dr. Terry D. Fife, of the University of Arizona who is the lead author of the guideline published in the May 27, 2008, issue of the medical journal *Neurology*.

BPPV, an inner ear disorder that commonly causes feelings of dizziness, is probably caused by loose calcium carbonate crystals that move in the sensing tubes of the inner ear.

Although no one is sure exactly what causes the crystals to break loose from the inner ear sensor, the problem has been linked to head trauma and viral infections of the inner ear, Fife says. At least one study indicates that your chances of developing BPPV increase with age, or if you have a history of migraine or stroke.

The treatment of choice for BPPV sufferers has long been to simply “tough it out.” While the condition is uncomfortable and can put the sufferer at risk of falling if he or she tries to move while experiencing vertigo, BPPV is not considered a serious health risk. If untreated, each episode lasts about two weeks, but recurrence is common.

“The good news is that this type of vertigo is easily treated,” Fife says. “Instead of telling patients to ‘wait it out’ or having them take drugs, we can perform a safe and quick treatment that is immediate and effective.”

By moving the patient’s head and body through a prescribed range of motions, a doctor or therapist can actually coax the calcium carbonate crystals out of the inner ear sensing tube where they don’t belong and into another inner chamber of the ear, where the body is able to reabsorb them.

“I have seen people who had BPPV for more than 15 years and who were cured after just one repositioning maneuver,” Fife says. In fact, studies show that the vertigo can be cured in more than 80 percent of patients at the time of treatment. Without treatment, the problem generally resolves itself within one month in about 20 to 50 percent of patients.

While it may be possible for patients to perform the maneuvers themselves, it’s probably still a good idea to have a doctor or therapist perform the treatment, Fife says. “There’s no evidence to suggest that having a patient do the maneuvers at home is more effective than having it done by a professional,” he says.

To learn more about the American Academy of Neurology, visit www.aan.com.

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