

## DO YOU HAVE “EAR ROCKS” GIVING YOU VERTIGO OR DIZZINESS?

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**Vertigo is a spinning sensation in your head and it is very disturbing.** Often nausea and balance problems will accompany your vertigo. There are many types of vertigo. Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) is the most common. BPPV is an inner ear problem that causes short periods of a spinning sensation when lying down, turning over in bed, or when looking up. Your head is moved in a certain position that causes the spinning. This particular head movement dislodges crystals in the inner ear (the utricle). The crystals are a layer of calcium carbonate material that is naturally present in the utricle. These tiny calcium crystals (otoconia) are called “ear rocks”.

Trauma to the head, infection, conditions such as Meniere disease, or aging, or for no apparent reason the crystals will move from the utricle to another part of the inner ear called the semicircular canal. This is where the “**ear rocks**” will stimulate the nerve endings and cause you to feel a spinning, dizzy sensation. BPPV symptoms reoccur predictably, perhaps seasonal or with weather changes. It is possible that BPPV might run in families.

Though BPPV can be extremely debilitating, the good news is that **we can help you get rid of the vertigo very quickly.** We will perform tests that move your head in specific positions to see whether vertigo and involuntary eye movement (nystagmus) results. If you have neck or back pain, as spine specialists, we can perform the tests without aggravating your neck or back pain. The tests will help us determine what type of vertigo you have as well as the cause of your vertigo. Once this is identified, the Epley maneuver will be performed to move the “ear rocks” from the semicircular canal back to their proper location in the utricle of the inner ear. Some may also require the Semont maneuver.

The Epley and Semont maneuvers are gentle and very deliberate head and body positions performed by your physical therapist while your symptoms and eye movement are monitored. Most experience immediate relief and require only 1-3 sessions of treatment. Depending on your test results you will be instructed specific short term activity and positional avoidance behavior in addition to specific exercises to maintain the proper location of your “ear rocks.” In some cases, test results will indicate the need for a surgical procedure called posterior canal plugging. This is rarely done and is a last resort option.

Your treatment plan will also include instruction on how to prevent the reoccurrence of your BPPV. About 50 percent of people may have a reoccurrence. If head injury caused your BPPV, the risk of reoccurrence is even greater.

If you have preexisting balance, fear of falling and falling issues, your treatment will be extended to include therapeutic exercise, functional and balance training to minimize your risk of falling and sustaining a fracture (broken bone).

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