

Initial Balance Assessment

Balance clinic

This leaflet is for patients with dizziness/balance issues and have been invited to attend an initial balance assessment appointment. This leaflet aims to inform patients on what to expect during their appointment and how to prepare, as well as some background information on the types of tests that will be carried out.

If you have any questions about your appointment or information provided in this leaflet, please contact your clinician to discuss these prior to your appointment.

The assessment

It is a good idea to understand how your body maintains balance. Your balance requires information regarding the orientation of your head and body from the three senses listed below. The information is sent to your brain where it is combined. These senses include:

- Visual input
- Proprioception or somatosensory inputs (sensors in your feet, muscles and joints)
- Inner ear balance organs input (vestibular system)
- AND Processing of all this information in the brain to maintain balance

If one of these sense's malfunctions, it can lead to imbalance and/or dizziness. During your assessment, the function of your vestibular system will be the focus.

This involves closely monitoring your eye movements to gain information on how your vestibular organs, are functioning as the vestibular organs are closely connected with your eyes.

Please note this is not visual test.

Purpose of the assessment

To gain an understanding of your current balance concerns and information on how your vestibular organs are functioning. The assessment involves an extensive History, a number of different tests, each providing valuable information on vestibular organ function.

The clinician will use your test results, along with your description of symptoms to provide an accurate diagnosis and management plan. In some circumstances, further vestibular testing or an onward referral to another service may be required. Your clinician will discuss this with you if this is the case.

What will happen after my assessments?

The balance assessments should help to identify the most appropriate management for your condition:

- 1. Vestibular rehabilitation-** Rehabilitation is offered through an individual basis to treat certain types of dizziness and other disorders of the balance system. However, it is not appropriate as a treatment for all the different disorders that might lead to dizziness and/or balance problems.
- 2. Onward referral** - It may be that your vestibular organs are not the reason for your symptoms and that onward referral is necessary.

Potential risks for performing the tests?

These tests are designed to trigger your dizziness, however it is unlikely that the tests will trigger long-lasting balance symptoms, but if this is the case please contact your clinician for further guidance.

The test and treatment require whole-body movements. This will especially focus on the head, neck, shoulders, back, feet and legs. Some of the tests may be adapted depending on your abilities. The clinician will perform a risk assessment to decide on the safest test and treatment.

Can I decline to have any of the tests performed?

Of course, we can only conduct these tests with your consent. The clinician will check you are happy to continue before beginning the test. You are free to decline any of the tests and treatments during the appointment. If you are concerned about the tests, contact your clinician prior to your appointment so this can be discussed.

Appointment

Appointment duration

Your first appointment is the basic assessment battery and will be allocated 1 our 15min to complete all necessary tests. You may need further appointments which will be booked on the day.

Preparation

- Please stop taking any anti-dizziness medication 48 hours before your appointment. Your balance medication may affect the results of your tests. This includes Stemetil, Prochlorperazine, Buccastem, Serc, Cinnarizine and Stugeron. Continue to take other medication as normal. Please check with your GP if further advice is needed regarding the interruption of your balance medication
 - Please do not consume any alcohol for 48 hours before your appointment
 - Please do not wear any make-up, including eye-makeup, to your appointment as it can interfere with the tests
 - Please bring a list of your current medications (if you take regular medication)
 - Your clinician will want to know your history of balance issues in detail. This will include; when it started, how it started, how it has changed over time, common symptoms, timeline of episodes etc. It may be helpful for you to think about this prior to your appointment and have a clear description ready for your clinician
 - You may wish to bring a bottle of water with you
 - There will be a lot of moving around during the appointment and the clinic rooms can become very warm (particularly in the summer). Please wear appropriate clothing that is loose fitting and allows you to move freely
-

What to expect during the appointment

This is a training department so you may be seen by a trainee and their supervisor. If you do not wish to be seen by a trainee, please let your clinician know.

1. History

A detailed report (description) of your balance episodes. The timeline of episodes and their triggers are important, along with how they have changed over time and whether you have noticed any associated symptoms during episodes. You will also be asked about your general health which includes medications, major surgeries, and other chronic conditions. A good history plays a vital role in diagnosis and management.

2. Completing a range of tests

The tests chosen will depend on your history and medical history. These may include:

- **Hearing Test**
- **Bedside testing** – These tests are conducted with you in a sitting position. They involve various forms of eye and head movements to assess any restrictions
- **Standing balance** – This test involves standing for 30 seconds in 4 different conditions (solid/spongy surface and eyes open/closed). This test assesses the brain's ability to integrate various information and maintain balance
- **Unterberger (Marching) Test** – This test involves marching on the spot for a duration of time with your eyes closed. This tests whether the vestibular organs are working equally
- **VNG (Videonystagmography)** – This test will involve wearing a pair of goggles with cameras which record your eye movements. You will be in a sitting position and asked to focus your eyes on a target in front of you. There will be several stages to this testing and the clinician will instruct you at each stage
- **Positional Testing** – These tests will involve sitting, lying and moving into various positions on an examination couch. This can include lying flat on your back and having the head and neck extended off the back of the couch. The clinician will instruct you into the positions and will monitor your eye movements. Some positions may not be possible for you if they cause pain or discomfort. You should discuss this with your clinician during the appointment. There are some adaptations to the positions which can make them more comfortable

Questions about the appointment

If you have any questions about your appointment, or any of the information provided in this leaflet, please contact your clinician before your appointment.

Contact us

Call Audiology Department [0300 365 6222](tel:03003656222)

Email hearingandbalance@berkshire.nhs.uk

Web berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/audiology

