



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Dizziness and Vertigo

Dizziness, or a feeling of lightheadedness, is often due to a momentary drop in blood pressure and blood flow to the head. This commonly happens when you get up too quickly from a seated or lying position. This experience is called "orthostatic hypotension," which means a drop in blood pressure related to position change. While this experience can be quite normal, the tendency may be aggravated by medications, dehydration, or illness.

Other causes of more persistent dizziness include the side-effects of medications, stress, anxiety, or alcohol. A less common cause of dizziness is an abnormality in your heart rhythm, which can cause recurrent spells of lightheadedness over a few days.

Vertigo is an even stronger form of dizziness, whereby you sense that either your body or the world around you is spinning. You may also feel nauseated, and you may even vomit. For some people, vertigo can make walking impossible. Although this dizzy sensation may be triggered by changes in head position, it can be caused by a viral infection, called "labyrinthitis." This virus often follows a cold or flu and causes swelling in the part of the inner ear that controls balance.

If you feel dizzy when you get up, you should sit down for a few minutes and breathe deeply. Then stand up again slowly. To prevent vertigo, you should avoid changes in head position that bring it on, or practice these positions until you can overcome the vertigo. Do not lie flat on your back when you have vertigo, since this position often makes the spinning sensation worse. If you feel the need to lie down, at least prop yourself up slightly.

Dizziness is not usually a cause for concern. However, you should call your health care professional if you think dizziness may be a side-effect of a medication, if dizziness or vertigo last longer than three to five days and interferes with your daily activities, or if vertigo is severe. You should also call if you experience any of the following four symptoms along with dizziness:

- 1.) headache, confusion, loss of hearing, changes in vision, weakness in the arms or legs, or numbness in any part of the body;
- 2.) fainting or loss of consciousness;
- 3.) recurring spells of lightheadedness over a few days;
- 4.) a pulse of less than 50 or more than 130 beats per minute.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION