



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Tests and Procedures: What to expect from an assessment in the Balance Clinic

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

**Balance Clinic**

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## **Why have I been sent an appointment?**

You have been referred to the balance clinic by a professional such as your GP or an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) doctor. This may be due to you mentioning some issues with dizziness or imbalance at your last consultation, or the referrer may feel that a balance assessment is necessary for your management.

The balance team is made up of Ear, Nose and Throat Consultants, Specialist Physiotherapists and Specialist Audiologists. We attempt to carry out all the initial investigations in one visit but sometimes you may be required to attend on a later occasion for further investigations.

# How can a balance assessment help me?

Evaluating your balance ability allows us to:

- Work out what may be causing your symptoms,
- Detect any unusual results which may require further investigation,
- Manage any balance problems that may be affecting your quality of life,
- Signpost you to appropriate sources of information and advice.

# What should I know or do before the appointment?

- Please complete the 'Dizziness Handicap Inventory' questionnaire that accompanies this letter and bring it with you to your appointment along with a list of your current medications and a list of your symptoms.
- Ideally you should stop taking anti-dizziness medications 48 hours before your appointment because they can reduce the accuracy of some test results. Before you stop using any medication, please check with your GP that it is safe to do so. If your GP does not recommend this then you should still attend your appointment but please inform the clinician that you are still taking your medications. Examples of anti-dizziness medication you might be taking include:

- Stemetil, Prochlorperazine and Buccastem
  - Serc and Betahistine
  - Sturgeron, Cinnarizine, Promethazine and Avomine
  - Dramamine and Dimenhydrinate
- Do not wear make-up around the eyes on the day of your appointment as this can interfere with us being able to get accurate results.
  - In order to accurately assess you it is very important that your ears are clear of wax. Your doctor should check your ears before referring you and let you know if you have wax in your ears. Unfortunately, most GP surgeries no longer perform wax removal so they may suggest some drops to help clear the wax, or private wax removal.

We may not be able to proceed with the assessment if you have wax in your ears. If this is the case, we can refer you for wax removal on the NHS however this will delay your treatment.

- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and recreational drugs for 24 hours before your appointment.

Information about getting to your appointment can be found on your appointment letter or by visiting the Trust's website: [www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/our-hospitals](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/our-hospitals). The Balance Clinic is located at the main York Hospital site.

If you need assistance for your visit such as hospital transport, interpreting services, a chaperone or assistance from the learning disabilities team please consult your appointment letter or visit [www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit1/attending-outpatients](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit1/attending-outpatients).

As a precaution we suggest you do not drive immediately following your appointment because some of the tests may make you feel slightly dizzy for a few minutes afterwards. Some people prefer to bring someone with them to the appointment for support and reassurance. There is a separate waiting area for the Balance Clinic where you may sit for as long as you need after the consultation.

## **What happens during the assessment?**

Your appointment will last around 2 hours. The first hour is spent with the Specialist Physiotherapist and the second hour is spent with the Specialist Audiologist.

Various assessments are available but not all of these may be carried out at your appointment. The specialists will choose the appropriate set of tests depending on the nature of your symptoms and your balance problem.

### **History of condition**

A thorough history of your symptoms will be taken, including onset, frequency, triggers and associated

symptoms. We will also ask about your past medical history and any medications you are taking as well as your activity levels and function, including work, driving, hobbies etc.

### **General balance/gait testing**

We will assess how good your balance is when you are standing still and moving. Your balance will be tested whilst standing still with eyes open and eyes closed. You will then be asked to do different tasks whilst walking; for instance, looking from side to side, changing direction and walking around obstacles. We recommend that you wear suitable footwear when attending the appointment.

### **Oculomotor examination**

We will assess your eye movements in different directions whilst your head remains still.

### **Positional testing**

Depending on your history a positional test called the Dix-Hallpike may be required. This is a quick and easy test involving you sitting on a couch. The Physiotherapist will turn your head to one side and then lie you down into a horizontal position, with your head tilted back a little. You will be supported by the Physiotherapist as you lie back onto the couch.

The Physiotherapist will be observing for any eye movements and to see if you feel any dizziness in that position. This will then be repeated to the other side. There may be a requirement to move your head in another position depending on the outcome. If we find a positive test, the treatment will be discussed and explained.

## **Hearing test**

Involves wearing headphones and pressing a button when you hear a tone. We will record the quietest sounds which you can hear and this enable us to determine the type and nature of any hearing loss you may have.

## **Tympanometry**

The recording allows the Audiologist to determine how well your ear drum moves and whether you have any congestion. A soft tip is placed in your ear canal and you may feel a slight sensation of pressure for a few seconds and hear a low pitched tone.

## **Videonystagmography/Electronystagmography**

Although it is not possible to record directly from your balance organs, it is possible to find out how well they are working by observing eye movements as there is a link between them. Recordings will be made as you follow a red light as it moves across a light bar. The preferred method of recording eye movements is made

using goggles which contain cameras. Alternatively, we may use sticky pad electrodes which record the muscle activity around the eye sockets. These are placed on the forehead and the temples either side of the head.

## **Caloric**

This allows the Audiologist to assess the balance organ of each ear separately so we can see if they are working at a similar level as they should be, or if one side is weaker than the other. You will be wearing the same goggles or electrodes for this test because we will still be recording your eye movements.

The test involves the Audiologist directing some warm air down your ear canal whilst you are lying down on a couch in a horizontal position, with your head slightly raised at an angle. The temperature change causes a reaction from your balance organ which then results in an eye movement which is recorded. This test is controlled and will not trigger an attack of your dizziness; however, some people may sense some degree of movement during the short recording period.

Depending on the results we may need to repeat the test with cool air, so there will be a maximum of four tests (two on each ear). If the results using air are inconclusive, we sometimes use water instead because this is a stronger stimulus.



## **Video Head Impulse Test (VHIT)**

A different set of goggles will be used for this test to record your eye movements. You will sit in a chair and the Audiologist will stand behind you. They will ask you to focus on a target on the wall straight ahead and with their hands placed on your head they will make short, swift head movements.

This test allows the Audiologist to assess how well the reflex between the balance organ and the eye is working during a series of everyday head movements.

If you have had neck or spinal problems, this test may not be appropriate and will not be carried out.

## **Are there any risks from the tests?**

We perform all assessments in line with national and local recommended procedures. All our staff are highly trained, and you will only be assessed by a clinician who has been internally verified as competent to do so.

Each part of the appointment will be described to you prior to going ahead. The instructions for each procedure will be given and the risks explained. Your verbal consent will be obtained before any procedure is carried out.

Performed in line with the relevant procedures, there are no long-term risks when safely conducting any of the

procedures explained in this leaflet. Your suitability for each procedure will be assessed prior to performing it, and you may be asked specific questions to ensure this.

Some audiological equipment and/or hearing aid accessories can interfere with some medical implants. It is important to let us know if you have a programmable ventriculo-peritoneal (PVP) shunt implant in your brain, or if you have a pacemaker. You should be asked about this prior to any test that may affect it.

You may experience some temporary sensations such as slight imbalance, increased awareness of tinnitus, or a blocked or pressure sensation in your ears, but all of these sensations should subside shortly after the assessment.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the department prior to your appointment or discuss them with the clinician during the appointment. We will not perform a procedure if you do not want us to.

## **When will I get my test results?**

Following your initial assessment all the results will be reviewed and discussed between an ENT Consultant and the Specialist Physiotherapist. From that discussion an appropriate treatment plan will be agreed which will be explained in a letter that both you and your GP will receive by post, approximately 2 weeks after your assessment.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact the Balance Clinic, Head and Neck Department, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725611 or email [yhs-tr.BalanceClinic@nhs.net](mailto:yhs-tr.BalanceClinic@nhs.net).

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net](mailto:yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:  
[www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/)

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