



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Balance Assessment Clinic

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Balance Centre

The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Tel: (01904) 725611 / (01904) 721021

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What happens in my appointment at the Balance Clinic?

You have been referred to the balance clinic because you have been experiencing dizziness or imbalance.

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. You can expect to be at the clinic for around two hours.

What should I do before I come to my 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
- Avoid wearing make-up around the eyes on the day of your appointment.
- Have your ears checked for wax at your GP surgery.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and recreational drugs for 24 hours before your appointment.

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 kind of tests should I expect?

The first hour is spent with the Specialist Physiotherapist and the second hour is spent with the Specialist Audiologist. All tests will be fully explained before starting and will only be carried out with your consent. With each specialist you will be asked some questions about your symptoms then, depending on your answers, you will be asked to undergo a series of tests in an attempt to find the cause of your problems.

Tests may include:

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 you attend the appointment.

Ocularmotor 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.

What can prevent a test from working?

Some of these tests cannot be performed on patients who have wax present in their ear canals. If you do have wax in your ears then we may need to repeat some of the assessments on another day following wax removal. Therefore, please arrange for your ears to be checked at your GP surgery prior to your appointment.

Sometimes eye makeup can prevent us from completing the tests which involve you wearing goggles. This is because the cameras we use get confused by dark eye makeup (e.g. mascara, eye liner) and cannot track your eye movements. Therefore we ask that you please do not wear eye makeup for your appointment.

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.

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:

Christy Davidson, Specialist Audiologist, Balance Centre, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 725611 or 01904 721021.

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 pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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Owner	Christy Davidson, Specialist Audiologist
Date first issued	August 2017
Review Date	June 2024
Version	1 (reissued June 2021)
Approved by	DR P G Reilly, ENT Consultant
Document Reference	PIL 1158 v1.3
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