

ASSESSMENT OF BALANCE DISORDERS

Balance disorders are often difficult to diagnose and treat using traditional methods, the reason being that balance disorders do not represent a single disease, but rather reflect a combination of multiple disorders. Balance requires integration of interactive components of sensory (Vision, vestibular, proprioception) motor and central nervous systems. Hence diagnosing a balance problem requires knowledge of these individual components. Still many clinicians prefer a traditional approach to diagnose and treat balance disorders with specialized services to be focused on localizing and treating specific pathologies. Because a typical balance disorder associated with multiple causes cannot be isolated to a single pathology on accurate diagnosis, requires a combination of tests to assess individual components along with their integrative actions. Even a specific pathology may show variations in the functional performance because of the brain's adaptive response. Hence it is essential for the diagnostic process to determine if imbalance involves misinterpretations of sensory cues. Testing summary systems individually may not reveal the problem.

The objective quantification of impairments and functional limitations is necessary to provide a foundation for the treatment plan that needs to be customized to include both the patient's pathology and functional impairment. For the chronic balance disorders involving multiple sensory and motor system problems a multidisciplinary team approach is indicated. Accordingly duly trained specialists from Otolaryngology, Audiology, Neurology, Physical Therapy Occupational Therapy and Psychiatry are likely to comprise above group. In the traditional

approach the patients visit multiple physicians before being diagnosed and managed effectively. Hence a multidisciplinary "balance team" should perform a comprehensive assessment and disease management focusing on every aspect from underlying pathology to resultant disability. Hence such a service delivery is not only cost-effective but also quick.

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