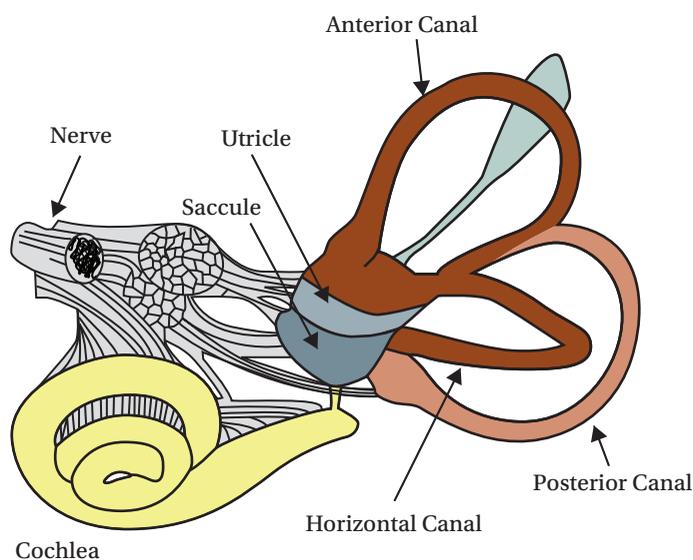




IT'S A BALANCING ACT

The vestibular system in your inner ear helps you maintain your balance by sending messages to your brain about movement, direction, and steadiness.



The labyrinth of the inner ear contains the cochlea, semicircular canals, utricle, and saccule.

Your vestibular system has three semicircular canals, plus two organs called the utricle and the saccule. Together, these are responsible for detecting turns and rotations of the body, as well as movement up-and-down and side-to-side. They are found in a part of your inner ear called the labyrinth. Also in the labyrinth is the organ that allows you to hear, known as the cochlea.

When your vestibular system works like it's supposed to, the organs in each ear send equal signals to your brain. In other words, the signals from your right ear are the same as the ones coming from your left ear. And these equal signals help you maintain your balance. Misinformation from one or both ears can result in dizziness or a balance disorder.

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DIZZINESS & BALANCE DISORDERS

Balance disorders can be hard to diagnose because there are several different kinds of balance disorders and because other medical conditions can contribute to balance issues. Your provider may order several types of tests to determine what might be affecting your balance. These may include hearing tests, tests that measure your balance system under different conditions, and CT or MRI scans.

SYMPTOMS OF A BALANCE DISORDER

When your balance system is not working correctly, a number of different symptoms can result. These may come and go, or they might continue for a long time.

Symptoms can include:

- Dizziness or vertigo
- Falling or a feeling of falling
- Lightheadedness
- Mental or physical tiredness
- Depression
- Blurred vision or having a hard time reading
- Nausea and vomiting
- Disorientation or confusion
- Fear, anxiety, or panic

CAUSES OF DIZZINESS

- Viral or bacterial infections in the ear
- A type of vertigo called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV)
- Head injury
- A benign growth called acoustic neuroma
- Blood circulation problems that affect the inner ear or brain
- A deformity of the ear called an enlarged vestibular aqueduct
- A disease of the labyrinth called Meniere's disease
- A cyst in the middle part of the ear called cholesteatoma
- Migraine headaches
- Abnormal growth of bone in the ear called otosclerosis
- Certain antibiotics and ototoxic medications
- Autoimmune inner ear disease

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