

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Vestibular (Balance) and Auditory Tests of the Inner Ear

The inner ear is a complex sense organ that is responsible for hearing and balance. Traditional hearing tests only look at a small portion of the hearing part of the ear. When patients have problems such as ringing in the ears, unexplained fullness, imbalance and/or dizziness more complicated tests may be required to diagnose what is causing these symptoms.

What types of tests are performed?

Due to the proximity and the natural associations of the balance portion of the inner ear and the hearing part of the inner ear a comprehensive audiological evaluation is one of the first tests that should be completed by a licensed audiologist. It is also important for the audiologist to know your complete medical history, including family history, current medications and general health. Dizziness/imbalance and vertigo affect people differently so we ask that you complete several questionnaire's regarding your current symptoms and how it affects your life.

What is an ENG?

ENG stands for "electro-nystagmography." This test looks at how the balance system connects to eye movement. Electrodes are placed around the patient's eyes, which record eye movements. It is a very easy test to perform. The first part of the tests records eye movement while a light moves around a screen. The second part records eye movements during and after head and body movements. The final part records eye movements while stimulating the inner ear. This is accomplished by briefly putting cool then warm air into each ear canal.

Will I get dizzy during the tests?

Some people feel a small amount of motion while the ears are being stimulated in the ENG. This is normal and completely temporary. The tests will not make your symptoms worse or provoke an attack. It is normal to feel a little bit "off" after the tests are complete. But again this is temporary.

How long does the test take?

Patients are seen for an initial appointment at which the audiologist reviews their case history, performs the comprehensive hearing tests, and reviews pretest instructions for the ENG. Please allow one hour for the initial appointment.

The second appointment is typically scheduled within a week of the first appointment. There are some medication and food restrictions prior to the ENG. Failure to comply to the pretest instructions can invalidate the test, and you may be asked to reschedule. Please allow one and a half hours for the second appointment.

Will I be able to drive after the test?

Generally we advise that if you are uncomfortable driving, you should have a driver available. However, most people who are able to drive to the appointment are able to drive home. It is normal to feel slightly dizzy during the test, but the effects of the test are TEMPORARY.

When will I know the results?

Your primary or referring physician will receive a copy of our report in a timely manner. With your permission we will call with results and our recommendations at that time as well. You may also set up a follow up appointment with the audiologist if you prefer a face to face consult.

What are some potential treatment options for my dizziness?

Treatment options mostly depend on the cause of dizziness, vertigo and lightheadedness. Depending on what is determined to be causing your problem; medication/surgery may help your symptoms. Our audiologists will keep in contact and consult your primary and referring physician if this is the case.

Most times, however, a “physical therapy” approach is effective at lessening the symptoms if they are provoked with head or body movements. Some of these services are provided in our office and at physical therapy centers, specially trained in vestibular rehabilitation therapy programs.