

Your first balance appointment

– what you need to know

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Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net.

Why do I need a balance appointment?

You have been referred to the audiology balance team because you have been having difficulties with your balance, such as dizziness, unsteadiness or problems walking in a straight line.

The balance system is a complicated arrangement of sensory inputs to the brain. If one of these inputs is damaged, absent or altered then your balance can be compromised.

A hearing test is always performed at the initial balance appointment as the hearing organ and balance organ are anatomically connected. Some balance conditions can also affect the hearing organ.

Who will I see for my balance appointment and how long will my appointment take?

You will see an audiologist specialising in balance testing and rehabilitation. We offer modern evidenced-based approaches and use a variety of techniques designed to investigate and improve balance conditions.

The appointment will last **up to 90 minutes**.

What happens during my balance appointment?

It is important that your ears are completely clear of wax for this appointment. Advice on how to do this is in your appointment letter.

If you have any questions during the appointment, please ask at any point.

The audiologist will take a detailed history about the problems you are experiencing with your balance and complete a thorough hearing and balance assessment. You can expect to be asked some detailed questions which will help us to build a picture of the impact that your balance difficulties are having on your life. Questions you may be asked include:

- How long have you been experiencing this problem?
- Is it continuous, intermittent or comes in attacks?
- Do you know of any triggers that cause you to experience imbalance?
- How long do you feel your balance problem lasts for?
- Did it come on suddenly?
- Are there other symptoms associated with the imbalance?
- What coping strategies do you already use?
- What are your concerns about it?

We will then perform an examination of your ears and a hearing test. The audiologist will then explain the results of the hearing test and the balance assessment and will start to form an idea of the cause of the balance problems. In most cases they will be able to discuss treatments that should address the balance problem. Usually the treatment plans for balance problems involve physical exercises that treat the specific condition. Although this may seem strange at first, the audiologist will explain the reasons for these and the evidence that supports these treatment methods.

As you may be offered a treatment exercise on the day, which can make you feel off balance, it is advised that you bring someone with you or arrange to be picked up following your appointment.

The audiologist will also address any other symptoms that you might have mentioned during the appointment. If the hearing test picked up any signs of hearing loss, the Audiologist may also discuss hearing aids and a separate appointment can be arranged if this is something you wish to pursue.

If further tests are needed for the identification of your particular balance problem, this will be explained to you and the appropriate appointment arranged. This can involve a referral to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) consultant, the Complex Care Team or for an MRI scan. The audiologist will explain the reasoning behind this in detail and what this will involve.

Do I receive any follow up care?

Depending on the type of balance problems, you will either be seen again by the balance audiologist either four or six weeks following your initial appointment, or receive a telephone follow-up. The purpose of this follow-up appointment is to monitor the success of the initial treatment plan, address any residual concerns you might have about your balance and adapt the strategies if necessary.

When you no longer require support or your balance problem is resolved, we will either discharge you or if you have hearing aids, we will review your hearing after five years.

What will happen to the results of my appointment?

A copy of the hearing test result and report of the balance assessments will be sent to your GP. You will automatically receive a copy of this report, unless you decline. If you require an onward referral to the ENT Department, who might request further tests, a letter will be sent to them explaining the reason for the referral.

A copy of the hearing test and brief record of the main points of discussion and treatment plan will be stored in your electronic records on the audiology database. You will also receive a copy of this plan.

How to contact us?

Please contact the audiology team on the numbers above if you require any specific communication support, mobility aid or other relevant assistance for this appointment. You are welcome to attend with a partner, carer, friend or significant other.

Furthermore, if you have any queries about your appointment or problems as a result of the test/procedure or about your hearing aid(s), please contact the Audiology Department. Our reception hours are 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Alternatively, email us at rduh.audiology@nhs.net.

If you are unable to attend or have questions, please contact us immediately.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website www.careopinion.org.uk.

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