

Mindfulness for chronic dizziness

Other formats

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What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a term used to describe the particular focus on our feelings, thoughts and body sensations at that present moment.

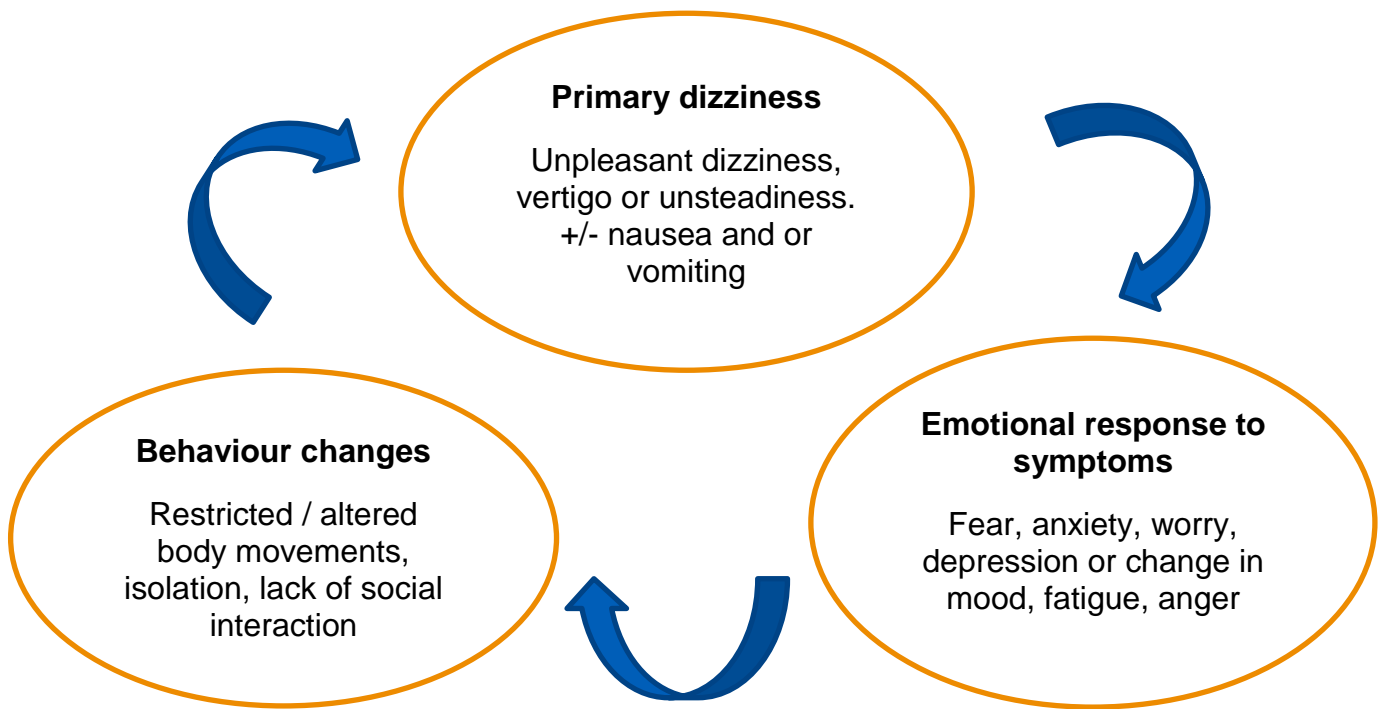
As many balance conditions are severe, recurrent or chronic in nature, mindfulness can be a helpful tool in managing these symptoms and reducing or reacting differently to secondary symptoms such as unhelpful thoughts or behaviours.

Most people who suffer with dizziness experience an automatic emotional response of fear and anxiety especially if it is their first encounter. This is our bodies' way of alerting us that something is wrong. Once the dizziness has passed or resolved we can still be left with these negative emotions and particularly a fear that it could happen again. Recognising these emotions and understanding them is important in successful rehabilitation. Mindfulness can help us feel and react differently to these secondary emotions and behaviours and therefore provide a more positive outcome.

How can mindfulness help me?

Mindfulness can aid rehabilitation by helping to control our bodies' emotional response to a negative experience. A lot of patients will experience the loss of control as more frightening than the actual symptoms of dizziness. Finding a strategy that works for you individually can minimise any anxiety or negative emotions that can come hand in hand with the dizziness.

The diagram below shows how we can develop a negative cycle from an unpleasant physical symptom and the ripple effect a physical symptom can have on us emotionally.



This negative cycle that can occur could make the primary symptom, that is dizziness, continue. For example, dizziness occurs after a person turns their head quickly, then a person becomes worried that, if they turn their head quickly again, it will happen again. They then create a change physically and restrict their head movements, and this can result in a stiff neck, tension and worsened anxiety.

Mindfulness can help to break this cycle and promote increase in functionality, improvement in mood and reduced anxiety.

How does stress affect us?

It has been well documented that if our brains are under stress, we will experience a different outcome or response to something. For example, if we have to take a test and our brain is stressed, fatigued and anxious, the likelihood is that we will find it more difficult to sit the test and potentially score lower. Our brain needs to be fuelled (regular healthy meals and hydration), well rested and under as little stress as possible in order to perform at its best.

We live in a very busy world and being stress free all of the time is somewhat unrealistic but what we can do is be more mindful of our body, how we treat it and our emotions to feel the best we can. This in turn should help us manage our health and living with any chronic symptoms such as dizziness.

Keeping a journal of how you feel can help for some people to highlight reasons for why they are sometimes feeling a little worse or better than on other days. A lot of people with chronic dizziness will report they have 'good and bad days' and if we look at lifestyle, stress and sleep hygiene in particular, this can often match up with the variability in their symptoms.

Types of mindfulness techniques

Breathing – looking at your breathing technique and controlling your breathing can help. Overbreathing, which is common when we panic, can make us feel light headed or dizzy.

Body scan – Working methodically through our bodies to ensure each part of us is as relaxed as possible.

Meditation / relaxation – Trying to ensure our environment is calm and relaxed. Some meditation techniques can also help.

Mindfulness in conjunction with diligent vestibular rehabilitation will give the most successful outcome.

Useful links

Apps

Headspace: www.headspace.com

Stop Breathe Think™: stopbreathethink.com

The Mindfulness App: www.themindfulnessapp.com

Websites on mindfulness

Seeking Balance: <https://www.seekingbalance.com.au/> ('Rock Steady' book by Joey Remenyi)

Be Mindful: www.bemindfulonline.com

Oxford Mindfulness Centre: www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/what-is-mindfulness

Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World: www.franticworld.com

Breathworks: www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk

Managing dizziness with mindfulness:
www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk/dizziness

Audiobook

Body scan: soundcloud.com/hachetteaudiouk/meditation-two-the-body-scan

Breathing anchor:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUeEnkjKyDs

soundcloud.com/r-tamuranovait/vidiyamala-burch-mindfulness-breathing-anchor-meditation

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.

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