

# THE BALANCE CENTER

Vestibular Rehabilitation & Balance Training

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## Recovering Balance Ellen Bodner, P.T., D.P.T.

Are you dizzy? Do you have trouble walking? You are not alone. These problems can interfere with the daily lives of people of all ages. There are many causes of dizziness and balance disorders. These include vestibular dysfunction, neurological disorders, sports/orthopedic injuries, diseases and side effects from some medications, depression and anxiety. According to studies from the National Institutes of health, about 40% of Americans will complain to their doctors of dizziness of at least once in their lifetimes.

The brain relies on three systems for balance: vision, the vestibular system or inner ear and sensation, especially from the joints in the legs and feet. If these systems are not in agreement, balance can be compromised.

The vestibular system, located deep within the inner ear, is crucial to balance. It can be disrupted in people of all ages. A specific mechanical problem in the vestibular system called Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV), affects 25% of all people over the age of 65. In this disorder, crystals that have dislodged from one part of the inner ear move into the semicircular canals which detect movements of the head. When the head is moved into a stimulating position, such as rolling over in bed or looking up, the sensation of spinning, called vertigo is triggered. This can be accompanied by a loss of balance and sometimes nausea.

Neurological problems can disrupt any and all of the systems used for balance. Such problems can be due to stroke, head injury, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's Disease. These can lead to many gait and movement disorders.

Balance/Vestibular Centers specialize in treating people with dizziness, balance problems and gait disorders due to all of the above conditions. A thorough evaluation should be performed by a Vestibular Certified Physical Therapist in order to determine the possible causes of the problem. The patient is then treated according to the findings which may include positional maneuvers for BPPV, vestibular exercises, balance/gait training, neuromuscular reeducation, and education for fall prevention.

An integral part of the evaluation and treatment is The Smart Balance Master, a computerized machine that tests the patient's ability to organize sensory information from the eyes, inner ear and feet in order to maintain balance. Results are stored and used for future comparison and documentation of improvement in balance. The Smart Balance Master can be programmed for balance training according to each individual's deficits.

## Stopping Childhood Obesity-One Child at a Time

It's no secret that obesity has become an epidemic among our country's youth. Obesity rates for children and teens have tripled since 1980 and doubled just in the last decade alone. Obesity is a contributing factor to many serious health issues such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension. Obesity and secondary health problems are caused by a combination of poor nutrition, inactivity, and genetic predisposition. So, what can we do to help our nation's youth? There's not much we can do about the genes we're born with, so it's important to focus on the two causes we can change, nutrition and inactivity.

Children are bombarded by advertising that says high fat, high sugar and processed foods are what they should eat. Rather than for its nutritional value, kids often eat food because it's cool, fun or for the free toy that comes with it. So what's a parent to do? Be a good role model! Research shows that parents who have adopted a lifestyle that includes healthy foods and regular exercise often have children who follow in their footsteps. Behaviors children see at home are the ones they will most likely adopt for themselves. Eat at least one meal together as a family each day, so that your children can regularly observe healthy eating habits. Try to fill your kitchen with a variety of healthy choices. Some helpful tips: buy pretzels, which are low in fat, instead of greasy chips; keep cut-up vegetables and ready-to-eat mini-carrots in the refrigerator; or sprinkle air-popped popcorn with grated parmesan cheese instead of butter. Save the kids favorite salty or sweet snacks for an occasional treat. Check out [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) for a list of more healthy snacks for kids. If your knowledge of nutrition needs an additional boost, schedule a visit with a nutritionist for your whole family.

Now that you have the facts to help your kids eat right, you have to get them moving! Experts say children should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. Encourage kids to get outside and play or get involved in sports. It is also recommended that TV and computer time be limited to two hours per day. Again, be an active role model for your kids. Let them see that you have made exercise a priority and schedule some family outings that include physical activities. Sign your kids up for a yoga class, cycling club or kid's fitness center. Be sure that the instructors supervising these classes have the appropriate knowledge to ensure your kids exercise safely and minimize risk of injury.

Here at Next Step Health and Fitness we are committed to helping children achieve a healthy lifestyle. Kid's Time at Next Step designs age-appropriate exercise and nutritional programs to specifically meet the needs of children and teens. We believe it's important to find a balance between healthy, tasteful foods, leisure time and physical activity. Finding this balance will help keep kids healthy and happy. Once kids start moving towards a healthy lifestyle, chances are they'll keep it going for the rest of their lives.

Kim Williams, M.A. is a Certified Youth Fitness Instructor and an Exercise Physiologist at Next Step Health and Fitness, which is a division of Ellen Bodner Physical Therapy. To receive more information about Kid's Time call (718)-217-2875

Also of benefit for people with balance and gait dysfunction is supervised exercise sessions. The goal of these sessions is to increase flexibility, strength, balance, endurance and long-term wellness.

Ellen Bodner, P.T., D.P.T. is the Executive Director of The Balance Centers and Next Step-Health and Fitness which are divisions of Ellen Bodner, Physical Therapy. For more information, call The Balance Center of Bayside at 718.468.9995,