

Problems with Balance and Coordination

What is balance and coordination?

Balance is the ability to stay in a steady position without falling.

Coordination is the ability to use different parts of your body together.

What causes problems with balance and coordination?

- Brain cancers
- Cancers of the spine and nerves
- Cancers that press on your nerves
- Cancer treatments
- Medications
- Feeling weak from your cancer or cancer treatments can cause problems with coordination and walking.

Radiation treatment can cause these problems.

These can start a few months after treatment or many months or years after treatment.

If you have trouble with balance you may feel:

- Dizzy
- Nauseated (feeling queasy)
- As if the room is spinning.

Will these problems get better?

Balance and coordination problems may get better or go away. They may also be permanent (they might never go away). This depends on what is causing the problem.



When should I talk to my health care team?

If you are having any balance or coordination problems, talk to your health care team. Do not wait until you have a fall or the symptoms get worse.

Tell your health care team about any new or changing symptoms you have.

You may need tests to figure out what is causing your problem:

- Neurological exam - painless set of tests to check your reflexes, how well you can feel something on your skin, and your balance.
- CT scan or MRI to look at your brain or other parts of your body.
- A test to check your risk of falling.

What are the treatments for balance and coordination problems?

Your health care team may give you medications to stop dizziness or nausea. You may need a mobility aid such as a cane, crutches or walker.

You may need to see a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist. They can help you make sure you are moving safely.

What can I do for myself?

Before starting any new exercises or treatments, please talk to your health care team. Ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

Choose a healthy diet

- Eat a balanced diet that includes calcium and vitamin D. Both of these are good for bone health and bone strength. You can have balance problems if your bones are weak.
- If you have questions about what to eat or drink, speak with a BC Cancer dietitian (www.bccancer.bc.ca/nutrition)
- If it is hard for you to cook or get groceries, ask a friend or family member for help. Tell your health care team if you do not have anyone to help you.

Exercise

- Do exercises that work on balance and muscle strength. Stronger muscles can improve balance.
- If you have moderate to severe balance and coordination problems, do not do high-risk activities like riding a bicycle. Listen to your body and be safe.
- Yoga and acupuncture may help.

Get regular check-ups

- Have your vision checked regularly. Vision problems can cause balance and coordination problems.

- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all of the medications you are taking.
- Talk with your health care team about your cancer, cancer treatment and your history of falls.

Prevent falls

Problems with balance and coordination can lead to a fall. Falling can cause injuries, such as a hip-fracture or brain injury.

- Get up slowly from a bed or chair. This will help stop a sudden drop in your blood pressure.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Wear shoes with non-slip rubber soles and low heels.
- Do not wear only socks on tile or wood floors.
- Use handrails on stairs and in slippery areas like bathrooms and kitchens.
- Try to keep your eyes open while showering so that you do not get dizzy.
- Get a cane or walker if you need one.
- Remove area rugs or tape down the edges so you will not trip over them.
- Keep stairs free of clutter.

Talk to your health care team about whether it is safe for you to drive.

Where can I learn more?

- BC Cancer Library Dyspnea (breathlessness) pathfinder: bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-dyspnea
- BC Cancer Supportive Care Services: www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportivecare

