



THE VESTIBULAR SYSTEM

What is it?

How the body handles movement is down to our vestibular system which is located in our inner ears. This sensory system helps us to keep upright against gravity and is stimulated when we move or change our head position. It enables us to keep orientated when we are bending over to pick something up, riding in a car, walking around and doing physical activities. More subtle vestibular activities include maintaining a seated posture and paying attention.

Problems you may see

- ✚ Avoids fast moving playground equipment.
- ✚ Hesitates or avoids walking down stairs.
- ✚ Gets dizzy very easily.
- ✚ Gets car sick on trips.
- ✚ A child may spin excessively or enjoy hanging upside down.
- ✚ Moving in their seats or getting out of their seats but not necessarily in an organised manner.
- ✚ May have poor sitting posture, eg slumping over their desk.
- ✚ Some children may have low muscle tone and, therefore, find P.E. activities challenging, and they may have poor balance skills.



Strategies to help

- ✚ Use a firm, supportive seat ensuring their feet are on a firm surface or the floor when doing homework or sitting at the dinner table.
- ✚ Discourage intense, lengthy spinning, even if they like it, as it disorganises the brain.
- ✚ Encourage swinging activities in various positions (sitting, on tummy, reclined) and in different planes of movement, with frequent stops and bumps.
- ✚ Encourage jumping on a space hopper or mini trampoline.
- ✚ Encourage active outside games such as rolling down a hill, going to the playground etc.
- ✚ Provide regular proprioceptive input.
- ✚ Encourage inverting the head (being upside down) as this promotes self-regulation.
- ✚ Do some "wake-up" activities before carrying out seated activities eg gentle stretches, movement of music, running and/or jumping on the spot are all good. Similar activities can be used for a minute or two throughout the day whenever you sense the need.
- ✚ For children who find it difficult to calm themselves provide linear (backwards and forwards) movement opportunities, eg rocking, swinging, rolling over a ball etc.