

Semi-Circular Canals - Balance Exercises Instructions

IMPORTANT: Please be careful doing these exercises. It might not seem like you are doing much but they are very powerful. It is the same system as when you spin on a roundabout as a kid and then get off and cannot walk in straight lines. These exercises seem simple and it might be tempting to do them more than we recommend. This is likely to cause you problems. When doing these exercises it is important that:

- **you do not feel dizzy at all;**
- **that you do not feel like the world you are looking at is jumping around or moving;**
- **that you are not getting any subtle tensions or twinges around your face and eyes;**
- **that your vision is not subtly ‘blacking’ out or your eyes are moving off the target;**
- **that you feel okay inside i.e. centred and balanced and that it is not making you feel more anxious.**

With these exercises perfect practise makes perfect. If you feel you have a problem doing these exercises it’s important to repeat them in a way that stops causing you the symptoms. You could try repeating the exercise **50% more gently – slower, smaller movements or less repetitions**. If you still have problems, please stop doing the exercises and consult your chiropractor or other balance expert.

You will benefit more from these exercises if you do them when you are at your most **fresh**, so probably avoid doing them too early or late in the day and when you’re hungry.

Your chiropractor has carefully calculated what your maximum reps are of this exercise before you fatigued. It’s important that you do no more than 50% of this, at least for the next fortnight. At that stage your balance system might be fit enough to start to increase the number of reps. It’s important that you are reassessed before you do this to check whether you’ll be okay.

The general process is:

1. Look at something straight ahead of you at eye level.
2. Keep your eyes fixed on the target throughout all the head movements.
3. Turn your head 30 degrees to the side instructed. Make sure you can still see the target with both eyes.
4. Your chiropractor will then have instructed you to either:
 - a. Put your head back to the middle and repeat.
 - b. Or tip your head forwards or backwards, keeping your head turned, eyes on the target and repeat.
5. For most people about 7 repetitions 3-4 times per day is about right. If your balance canals are more sensitive then 2-3 movements may be sufficient. You can reduce the speed, distance moved and number of repetitions you perform if needed.

About the balance canal system:

Next to each ear you have 5 balance canals, which act like spirit levels that can detect movement and position of the head. If one of them is not working you might feel dizzy or you might feel your head or shoulders are level when they are actually tilted to one side. If the balance canals are not working properly your brain is likely to think you are falling over so it tightens some muscles and switches other ones off to



help keep you upright – even though you might not really be falling. This of course can twist the body, tighten the spine or cause muscle spasm.

Your balance system depends on the sensory feedback from these balance canals, your eyes and the body awareness sensors in your joints and soft tissues. Part of your brain called the cerebellum plays an important role in integrating these together. You should be able to cope on 2 out of 3 of these systems. But if the eyes are not able to work too well, or the joints and muscles are tight, then you will be more sensitive to balance canal issues.

The balance canal exercises we give are based on recalibrating the balance canals, neck movements and eye muscles to help them work together. The technical term for the mechanism we are using is the vestibular ocular reflex otherwise known as VORs.

In our view your balance canals might not be working so well for various reasons. As chiropractors we are interested in restoring function where possible. Functional causes of problems can be caused by stress – which can be physical, chemical or neurological. For example the balance canals may not be working through underuse or postural issues. There may be also be damage to them caused by various medical problems.

