Q: What is vertigo?

A: Many people who feel dizzy have vertigo, a specific type of dizziness. Vertigo causes a sense of spinning dizziness, swaying, or tilting. You may feel that you are moving or that the room is moving around you. The most common symptoms of vertigo include a feeling of:

- Spinning (you or the room around you)
- Tilting or swaying
- Feeling off balance

These feelings come and go, and may last seconds, hours, or days. You may feel worse when you move your head, change positions (stand up, roll over), cough, or sneeze. Along with vertigo, you may:

- Vomit or feel nauseous
- Have a headache or be sensitive to light and noise
- See double, have trouble speaking or swallowing, or feel weak
- Feel short of breath or sweaty, have a racing heart beat

Q: What causes vertigo?

A: The most common causes of vertigo include:

- Inner ear problems — Collections of calcium, inflammation, and viral infections can cause problems in the vestibular system. The vestibular system includes parts of the inner ear and nervous system, which controls balance. Below are three of the most common types of vertigo caused by inner ear problems.

- Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) — BPPV, sometimes called benign positional vertigo, positional vertigo, postural vertigo, or simply vertigo, is a type of vertigo that develops due to collections of calcium in the inner ear. These collections are called canaliths. Moving the canaliths by repositioning the
head is a common treatment for BPPV. These movements encourage the calcium collection to move into a part of the ear where it will be reabsorbed. You may begin to feel better immediately after this treatment or within a day or two.

• Meniere disease — Meniere disease is condition that causes repeated spells of vertigo, hearing loss, and ringing in the ears. Spells can last several minutes or hours. It is probably caused by a buildup of fluid in the inner ear.

• Vestibular neuritis — Vestibular neuritis, also known as labyrinthitis, is probably caused by a virus that causes swelling around the balance nerve. People with vestibular neuritis develop sudden, severe vertigo, nausea, vomiting, and difficulty walking or standing up; these problems can last several days. Some people also develop difficulty hearing in one ear.

• Head injury — Head injuries can affect the vestibular system in a variety of ways, and lead to vertigo

• Medications — Rarely, medications can actually damage the inner ear. Other medications can affect the function of the inner ear or brain and lead to vertigo.

• Migraines — In a condition called vestibular migraine or migrainous vertigo, vertigo can be caused by a migraine.

• Brain problems, such as a stroke or TIA (transient ischemic attack), bleeding in the brain, or multiple sclerosis can also cause vertigo.

Q: When should I seek help?

A: You should seek help immediately if you have dizziness or vertigo along with any of the following:

• New or severe headache

• Temperature greater than 100.4°F (38°C)

• Seeing double or having trouble seeing clearly

• Trouble speaking or hearing

• Weakness in an arm or leg
• An inability to walk without assistance
• Passing out
• Numbness or tingling
• Chest pain
• Vomiting that will not stop

• Are an older adult
• Have had a stroke in the past
• Have risk factors for stroke (high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking)

Q: Besides repositioning the head as you mentioned above is there any other treatment for vertigo?

A: If you have spells of vertigo that are severe or last for hours or days, your health care provider may recommend a medication to relieve severe vertigo symptoms, like vomiting. Antihistamine medicines such as Dramamine and Benadryl can be used. Treatment with medication is not usually recommended if your vertigo lasts only second or minutes.