



Vestibular Syndrome:

The vestibular apparatus is part of the inner ear. It's the neurological equipment that allows us to walk or run without falling, even when on irregular surfaces. It helps us know when we need to right ourselves, and allows our eyes to follow moving objects without becoming dizzy.

From centers in the inner ear, instructions are carried by nerve cells to the legs, neck muscles, and eye muscles so that we may orient ourselves immediately. If there is trouble in the vestibular apparatus, patients will feel very dizzy. It's similar to vertigo or seasickness in people.

Signs of Vestibular Disease:

- Ataxia (lack of coordination without weakness or involuntary spasms, i.e. stumbling and staggering around)
- Motion sickness.
- Rapid eye movements called nystagmus
- Circling or head tilting
- Falling to one side (usually toward the side of the lesion).
- Trouble with other nerves controlling the head and face.

Causes of Vestibular Disease

- Idiopathic (unknown cause)
- Middle ear infection
- Brain lesion- tumor, vascular accident, infection, or inflammation in the brain

In the event of a brain lesion, it is important to know whether the lesion is central (in the brain) or peripheral (in the inner ear) to determine prognosis and choose treatment. Clues often come from the patient, but sometimes imaging of the brain will be important in determining the nature of the lesion. This means a CT scan or MRI to image the brain. General anesthesia is required for both CT and MRI.

Idiopathic disease is the most common cause of these signs. Canine idiopathic vestibular disease (also called "old dog vestibular disease") and its feline counterpart begin acutely (rapidly) and resolve acutely. Usually, improvement is evident in 72 hours. Many animals are normal in 7-14 days; occasionally a head tilt persists. When a case of vestibular disease presents, doctors often advise routine blood/urine database to check general health. Doctors may not advise brain or ear imaging right away.

Treatment of idiopathic vestibular disease generally involves control of nausea (motion sickness) while the condition runs its course. If ear disease is present, that will also be treated. Some patients become so dizzy and nauseated that they do need support in hospital, but most can be managed at home. Doctors often give anti-nausea medications to animals in the hospital and will prescribe motion sickness medications for once the patient has returned home.