

Patient information factsheet

Your child's balance assessment appointment

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been referred to the audiology department for a balance assessment. It explains what to expect at your child's appointment. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is a balance assessment?

A balance assessment is made up of several different tests. The tests are designed to assess whether the balance organs in your child's ears (vestibular system) are working properly. Different tests are appropriate for different children. Depending on the tests your child needs, we may complete the tests over one or two appointments. Please allow up to one and a half hours for each appointment.

Why has my child been referred for a balance assessment?

Your child's ear, nose and throat (ENT) consultant or paediatrician (a doctor who manages medical conditions affecting infants, children and young people) has referred your child for a balance assessment. This might be because your child:

- has a hearing loss (some children with hearing problems also have problems with their balance as the balance and hearing organs in the ear are linked)
- is struggling with their balance or experiencing dizziness

A balance assessment will help us to find out more information and decide on the best way to help your child.

How should I prepare for my child's appointment?

We will send you some questionnaires to complete before your child's appointment. Please bring the completed questionnaires with you to your child's appointment. Alternatively, if we have arranged a telephone call with you, please have these to hand for the call.

Your child can eat and drink normally before their appointment. However, we recommend that you avoid giving them a large meal.

Please allow plenty of time to get to your child's appointment.

Can I stay with my child during the appointment?

You will be able to stay with your child during their appointment.

What will happen at the appointment?

Your child will be seen by one or two highly trained audiologists who specialise in balance testing.

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We will begin the assessment by going through your child's completed questionnaires with you. We will also ask your child some questions about their symptoms, even if we have already discussed this over the phone with you.

We will then complete some or all of the following balance function tests:

Clinical test of sensory interaction and balance

We will ask your child to stand on the floor to see how much they sway when they are standing. We will ask them to do this with their eyes open and then again with their eyes closed. We will then ask them to repeat this while standing on a foam cushion.

Functional tests

We may ask your child to:

- sit on a gym ball and see if they can keep focus on a target while bouncing up and down
- walk up and down the room while catching a ball or looking for pictures on the wall
- stand on one leg and see how long they can balance for

Vestibular evoked myogenic potentials

This test looks at a part of your child's inner ear. We will put four small sticky pads on your child's forehead and the sides of their neck. We will then ask them to listen to some clicking sounds through small earplugs. We may also put some sticky pads on the skin under their eyes and ask them to look up while listening to the clicking sounds.

Video head impulse test

We will ask your child to wear a set of goggles (these look similar to swimming goggles) that have a camera over one eye. We will then move your child's head while they are looking at a target in front of them, such as a sticker or a picture. The camera will record your child's eye movements.

Video nystagmography

We will ask your child to wear a set of video goggles and then follow a beam of light with their eyes. We will watch their eye movements as they do this.

Rotational chair

We will sit your child on a swivel office chair (or have them sit on your lap in the chair) and then turn the chair around a few times (like on a roundabout at the park). We will then observe their eye movements when the chair has stopped turning. We will then turn the chair in the opposite direction to repeat the test.

Caloric testing

This test is not suitable for very young children.

We will ask your child to lie on a couch and wear some video goggles. We will then gently pour a small amount of warm or cool water into their ear. While we do this, we will watch their eye movements to assess how well their balance system is working.

Are there any risks?

During the appointment, your child may experience some feelings of dizziness. This does not usually last long and we are happy to take breaks if needed.

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When will I receive my child's results?

We will usually be able to give you your child's results at the end of the appointment. We will then send your child's results to the doctor who referred them for this assessment, and they will make an official diagnosis, if necessary. If the results show that your child may benefit from doing balance exercises, we will discuss this with you and arrange a further appointment to provide your child with an exercise programme.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's appointment, please contact us.

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