



# How Prevalent are Vestibular Disorders in 2018?

*by Adam Dawson*

Most of us probably take balance for granted. Like breathing, it's not something we have think about unless, or until, something happens to disrupt our innate sense of balance.

According to the Vestibular Disorders Association (VEDA) , our vestibular system includes the parts of the inner ear and brain that help control balance and eye movements. When the system becomes damaged by aging, disease, or injury, vestibular disorders are often the result, and are associated with one or more of the following symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Vertigo
- Imbalance

- Tinnitus
- Nausea
- Vision disturbance
- Problems concentrating
- Depression and anxiety

Balance is something that can be improved and even mastered through exercises like yoga and tai chi. Or it can be something we lose, causing confusion and anxiety along the way.

We've all, at some point in our lives, experienced moments of imbalance, be it motion sickness, slipping on ice, or tripping over a curb. It's a horribly disorienting feeling, but usually goes away quickly. However, for millions of Americans, there is no baseline to return to... just more imbalance.

The Center of Disease Control (CDC) reports that falls are the leading cause of injury and accidental death for those 65 years-old and older. Although 33- percent of senior adults have at least one fall each year, only half of those talk to their doctors about it. And because vestibular diagnoses tends to be problematic, the average patient sees four to five doctors before getting an accurate diagnosis.

Because vestibular disorders often go unreported, and because they are so difficult to diagnose, getting exact numbers of how many Americans are affected can be tricky. A conservative estimate indicates that more than one-third of U.S. adults over the age of 40 have experienced vestibular dysfunction. That's 69 million Americans who have experienced balance problems in their lives.

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), as many as 2.4 million Americans have ongoing problems with dizziness. While VEDA reports that 80 percent of all Americans 65 and older have experienced dizziness at some point, with one-third of those resulting from vertigo. However, when it comes to vestibular disorders, it's not just seniors who are affected.

It wasn't long ago that incidences of pediatric vestibular disorders were thought to be rare. As it turns out, that isn't the case. Whether vestibular disorders in children are on the rise or just receiving more attention is difficult to say. But the numbers of children being diagnosed appears to be growing.

Getting exact numbers on how prevalent vestibular disorders are, or how many Americans are affected, is difficult for numerous reasons. Besides the problems associated with diagnosing vestibular

disorders, patients don't always seek help. However, even the lowest estimates indicate a fairly substantial problem exists, and one that affects many millions of Americans.

What we do know is that vestibular problems can either come on suddenly or be a gradual progression, and create an environment where even the simplest tasks become anything but simple for those affected. Even sleeping can be nightmarish when your ears won't stop ringing.

### **The Need for More Vestibular Health Care Professionals**

As vestibular disorders become more prevalent in our society, we will continue to have a need for more health care professionals to treat them. It's a simple matter of supply and demand. And right now, the supply of competent care is lagging far behind the demand.

Diagnoses of vestibular problems is perhaps the greatest concern, as they can be slow, unreliable, and inaccurate. Which is why it often takes seeing four or five doctors to get the diagnosis right.

Better coping strategies is also an area where improvement cannot come fast enough, especially for vestibular patients who have a balance disorder deemed incurable. Helping those patients find a way to maintain a high quality of life will be the challenge.

As awareness continues to grow, the need for balance technologies will as well. If you're interested in getting more information, get in touch with your local e3 office today. We'd love to help you assess your current needs and equip you with the balance technology that suits them.

**About the Author**

Adam is the Digital Marketing Coordinator at e3 Diagnostics. His interest in hearing healthcare is driven by his passion for music because he feels everyone

should be able to clearly listen to Pet Sounds at least once in their life. In his free time, he enjoys playing video games, digging through record stores for classic vinyl, shooting hoops, and writing stories.