The “DIZZY” Patient: Neurological Causes
“Can you describe your symptoms in any way other than dizzy?”

**Peripheral Cause**

**VERTIGO:**
False sense of motion, often described as rotational
“I feel like I am spinning.” OR
“The world is spinning around me.”

**Objective Findings**
- Patient can describe exact position of first episode
- Episodic // “Spinning”
- Moderate to severe
- Change in head position, head movement, or visual input
- May be associated with pressure, fullness or hearing loss (i.e. Meniere’s, labyrinthitis); “Voices sound distorted.”

**Subjective Findings**
- Gradual onset
- Constant // “Unsteady”
- Mild to moderate
- Standing or walking; may be “stirred-up” with head movement or closing eyes
- No definitive or predictable hearing loss

**NEUROLOGICAL RED FLAGS**
- Diplopia (The 4 Ds)
- Dysphagia
- Dysarthria
- Dysmetria
- Weakness
- Memory loss
- Visual field loss
- Loss of balance
- Tremors
- Rigidity

**Central Cause**

**DISEQUILIBRIUM:**
Feeling of imbalance when standing or walking
“I feel unsteady when I am up on my feet.”

**Objective Findings**
- Vertical with torsion, or horizontal nystagmus
- Fatigues and adapts to the provoking position. Fixation↓
- May have hearing loss: Meniere’s = ↓’d low freq. Labyrinthitis = ↓’d any freq.
- No Neurological Red Flags

**Tests**
1. Head Impulse (Thrust) Test
2. Hallpike-Dix Maneuver

**Essential History Questions**
- When did the symptoms begin?
- Symptoms constant? // Describe
- How severe are the symptoms?
- What aggravates the symptoms?
- Is there an associated hearing loss or other problems with the ear?

**Examination**
- What is the direction of the nystagmus?
- How does the nystagmus behave?
- Is there associated hearing loss?
- Any Neurological Red Flags?

**Remember the HINTS:**
Head Impulse, Nystagmus, Test of Skew

**Objective Findings**
- Vertical, horizontal, rotary or combination nystagmus
- Does not fatigue or may ↑ with fixation. May reverse direction
- No definitive or predictable hearing loss.

- Often associated with Neurological Red Flags

**Tests**
1. Smooth Pursuit
2. Saccades
3. Gaze Fixation

Fred Heisler, PT