

The vestibular system

Essentially our vestibular sense helps us to 'keep tabs' on the position and motion of our heads. However, our vestibular system is the most connected sensory system in our body. It works alongside our other sensory systems (including the proprioceptive sense), enabling us to use our eyes effectively and process sounds in our environment.

Amongst other things it is responsible for, spatial awareness, balance, hand/eye, eye/foot coordination, tracking moving objects and basically keeping us upright. There is way more to it than this and I will incorporate some links for further reading at the end of this article.

Like the proprioception system, the vestibular system can be either under or over responsive.

Under responsive vestibular system MAY present with some of the following difficulties.

- Movement seeking
- Loves being tossed in the air
- Could spin for hours and never appear to get dizzy
- Always jumping on furniture, trampoline, spinning in a swivel chair, or loves hanging upsidedown.
- Will prefer to run, jump or hop to just walking.

Over responsive vestibular system MAY present with some of the following difficulties.

- Avoids/dislikes playground equipment,
- May be terrified of falling when there's no real risk of it.
- Fearful of walking up or down stairs or walking on uneven ground.
- Loses balance easily and may appear clumsy.
- Afraid of heights, even small ones such as a kerb.
- Fearful of activities that require good balance.

Activities to help develop the vestibular system.

Because the vestibular and proprioception systems work so closely together, many of the activities are similar to those done for proprioception.

Action songs

Row your boat.

The rocking back and forth creating motion stimulating the vestibular system,

If you're happy and you know it...

spin around, jump up and down, nod your head, stand on one leg. Again be creative and make up your own actions involving movement and balance.

Humpty Dumpty

As in proprioception description, gently bouncing on the ball involves the child trying to maintain balance (with your help of course), and keeping their body and head up whilst bouncing up and down.

Ring a roses and here we go round the mulberry bush - or any other songs and rhymes involving going round in a circle.

Other fun activities to try.

Swinging in a blanket - lay your child in a blanket on the floor, then two adults take an end each and gently swing the child to and fro like a hammock, singing "rock a bye baby" or something similar. After each time singing the song gently lower your child to the floor and pause (especially if your child is non verbal) to see if he/she will indicate he/she wants more, with a sound or a look or a smile, lots of praise if they do.

Build an obstacle course

Time again to get creative, either in your house if you have a big enough space or out in the garden. Use a variety of objects for example create a line of cushions or foam as an uneven surface for your child to walk over, put a chair out for him to go over or under, create a spot where he/she has to jump 5 times, maybe crawl or roll over to the next activity. If you have a tunnel or just a blanket, hold it up at one end and encourage your child to crawl under it pushing his/her way out the other side if you have a plank of wood or small bench encourage your child to walk over it whilst maintaining his/her balance (lots of help if needed but at the same time allow them to feel their sense of balance allow them to wobble a little... **Most of all Have fun!!**

Again I will post more activities in the coming weeks for you to try in the meantime if you want to learn more about the vestibular system or proprioception here are some useful links

<https://hes-extraordinary.com/vestibular-input-activities>

<https://hes-extraordinary.com/category/sensory-activities/vestibular>

<https://hes-extraordinary.com/category/sensory-activities/proprioceptive>