

Brain injury blog
by survivor & coach

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Balance feeling unstable due to brain injury, it's awkward



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Balance is a very complicated thing, but it starts with your inner ear. Effectively we are fitted with our own little spirit level called the vestibular system. If it becomes damaged it can make balance a lot more difficult. I mentioned before in [Tinnitus, the loathsome bells of brain injury](#) that I have suffered with tinnitus for many years. But since my brain injury it has got worse. But whilst a Doctor was trying to diagnose my condition all those years ago, I was asked to perform a simple test. I was told to close my eyes and walk forward. A nurse was stood behind me in case I fell. After just a few steps I heard voices saying "It's OK I've got you." Apparently I had been about to topple over, but I didn't recognise it at all.



All the elements that go into balance.

What that test showed that I was using my sight to help my brain decide which way was up. Once vision was taken away I was forced to listen to my inner

spirit level, showing how inaccurate it was. But as long as I continued to walk around with my eyes open, I was able to cope.

But my brain injury changed that. There are so many reasons that might be the case as balance is a complicated recipe.

- **Vision** – As your eyes give you a picture of what the world looks like, that information helps massively. Unfortunately as I have double vision now, this sense is not as reliable anymore.
- **Muscular strength** – It takes a number of muscles able to produce a lot of force to keep us balanced. But as I have left sided weakness even that causes an imbalance within me.
- **Coordination** – Being able to confidently place a foot on the floor as you take a step is something we learn early on in life. But my nerve damage means the communication between my limbs and my brain is off-kilter. Therefore I might expect my foot is about to touch the floor, but it's not.
- **Brain-stem** – As it controls movement it is also essential when taking those steps. I had a bleed which was next to my brain-stem and irritated it, affecting my control of movement.
- **Inner ear** – Your in built spirit level. But we already know mine is broken.

When the world is spinning.

Together this means I can have spells of vertigo. Even if I'm sat down my brain can still be convinced the world is spinning. Some people find that if their head is spinning whilst in bed, putting a foot on the floor stops it. This is most likely because the information your foot sends back about the flat, still ground, helps convince your brain that is correct. Sadly this has never worked for me. I found this would be at it's worst when my vision was particularly bad. Not a good combination, I can tell you.

But I have improved, maybe it's because a little more strength is back. Or maybe it's because my cognitive abilities have improved. You don't realise all the calculations your brain does, and all the information it analyses in a fraction of a second. So just as my brain had learned to listen more to my eyes, than my spirit level, perhaps it is re-calibrating to the current inaccurate data.

Wish I had a tail.

Lots of animals such as monkeys, squirrels, cats and dogs have the advantage of an extra limb. The tail. And it helps them balance in the most challenging of situations. They swish it around to move their centre of gravity to counteract any

imbalances. And don't they just look majestic when they do this. Think of how a Leopard changing direction to chase their zig zagging prey, flashes its tail to the side to do a handbrake turn.

Instead I have arms. So often when I get up in the night or go to the toilet I look like I'm walking a tightrope. Except it's not impressive when you're walking on a carpeted landing.



I don't use a walking aid anymore as I need to keep practising for the re-calibration process to be successful. But it would help the rest of the world know as it rushes by to give me a little more room.

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Has your balance been affected? Is there anything in particular that has helped you?