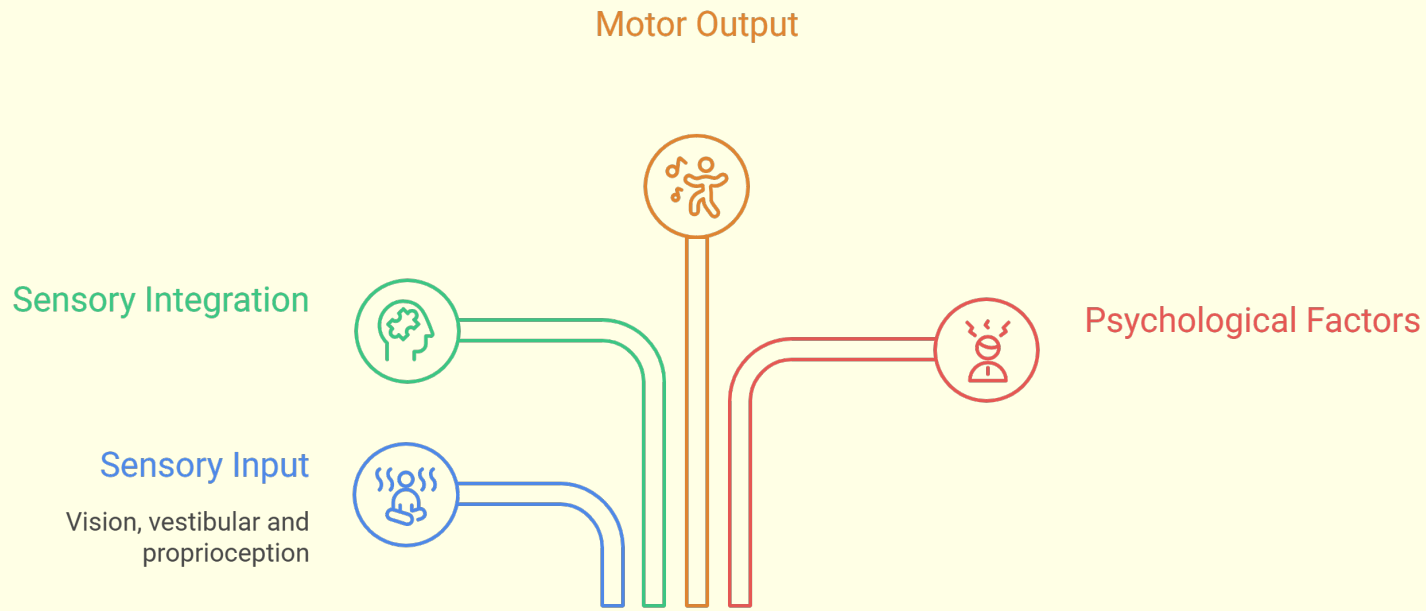
usherkids uk

Balance

Dr Saima Rajasingam
Audiologist and Vice-President of British Academy of Audiology
Chloe Joyner, Chair of Trustees

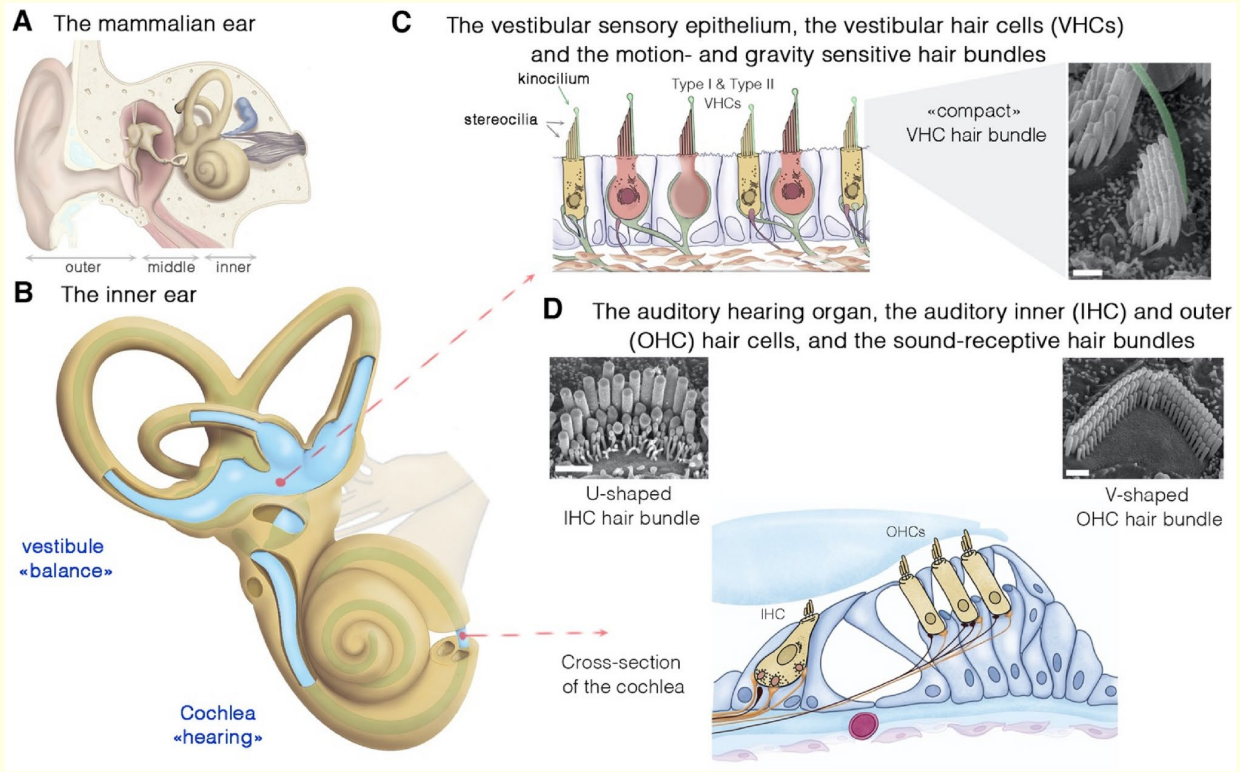
A bit about balance…

Maintaining Balance



Made with Napkin

Vestibular sensory cells and Usher Syndrome



Paediatric vestibular assessment & when to consider

- Not available everywhere and not always indicated (more commonly affects USH1B)
- When to think about it – delayed motor milestones and general imbalance (falling).
- Potential management: Vestibular rehabilitation therapy
- A general note: regular physical activity is recommended (think about activities that promote balance and co-ordination)
- Some really good practical suggestions on Usher Kids website

Understanding balance challenges

Balance depends on three systems working together:

01 VISION

Knowing where we are in space

02 VESTIBULAR SYSTEM

Balance organs in the inner ear

03 PROPRIOCEPTION

Feedback from muscles, joints and feet

What parents may notice at different ages

BABIES & TODDLERS

- Delayed sitting, crawling or walking
- Frequent falls or bumps
- Reluctance to try certain movements

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

- Difficulty with reading or tracking moving objects
- Increased fatigue
- More difficulty in PE or playground activities

TEENAGERS

- Avoiding certain sports or activities
- Greater fatigue after physical activity
- Challenges in low light or unfamiliar environments

IMPORTANT REMINDER **Every child is different and develops at their own pace**

Early years:
Building strong foundations before moving on

SOMETIMES PROGRESS MEANS SLOWING DOWN FIRST

Before focusing on walking, it can be helpful to strengthen the building blocks that make walking possible:

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

- ✓ Head control
- ✓ Core strength and sitting balance
- ✓ Reaching, turning and weight-shifting
- ✓ Kneeling and supported standing

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Encourage reaching for toys in sitting
- Use play that involves turning, stretching and balancing
- Support standing from behind where possible
- Focus on quality of movement, not just the next milestone

KEY MESSAGE **A child may be ready for the next step developmentally only after earlier balance skills become more secure**

The best ‘therapy’ often looks like play

MOVEMENT BUILDS BALANCE

Helpful activities include:

- Gymnastics
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Football and ball sports
- Trampolining
- Racquet sports
- Boxing
- Pilates and yoga (for older children)

WHY THEY HELP

01 Core strength

02 Coordination

03 Single-leg balance

04 Head movement tolerance

05 Confidence after falls

BUILD BALANCE INTO EVERYDAY ROUTINES

- Barefoot play on different surfaces
- Standing on cushions while brushing teeth
- Reaching, stretching and turning games
- Bubble chasing and tracking games
- Dancing games
- Catching and throwing balls

Support participation and success through safe challenge

AT SCHOOL AND CLUBS: AIM FOR "SAFE CHALLENGE", NOT AVOIDANCE

- Encourage PE and sport to build confidence, independence and skills
- Add supervision for higher-risk activities
- Offer rest breaks and educate staff
- Keep spaces well lit and remove trip hazards

FOR SWIMMING, ADD SPECIFIC SAFETY SUPPORT

- Swimming builds strength, confidence and valuable movement experience
- Children can struggle to identify 'up' underwater
- Teach the "mushroom technique" for resurfacing
- Use closer supervision; smaller groups may help

REMEMBER THE GOALS: **CONFIDENCE** **INDEPENDENCE** **SKILLS**

Children need opportunities to build all three

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE **A diagnosis does not define what your child can achieve**

Further resources on balance

Testing and specialist vestibular services:
If local services aren't available, several Audio-Vestibular clinics currently accept out-of-area paediatric referrals (via GP or Audiology);

- Alder Hey (referral criteria on their website)
- Sheffield Children's (currently closed for the next 6 months due to refurbishment)
- Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH)
- St George's, London
- University College London
- Manchester (case-by-case basis)

Visit our website for videos and further resources