

What is Meniere's Disease

Author: ??

FACT SHEET



Vestibular Rehabilitation
Special Interest Group



What is Meniere's Disease?

Meniere's disease is an inner ear disorder that causes repeated episodes of 1) vertigo (spinning), 2) hearing loss, 3) tinnitus (ringing in the ear), and 4) fullness or pressure in the ear. These episodes, or attacks, often come on suddenly and last a few minutes or many hours. Often, people do not feel any of these symptoms in between episodes. The exact cause of Meniere's disease is not known. One thought is that the fluid in the inner ear builds up, causing pressure within the inner ear. Meniere's disease can run in families and is also associated with migraine headaches.

The severity of symptoms may be different with each episode and between people. Every symptom may not be there with every episode. Some people have severe symptoms while others only have mild symptoms. Some people have attacks many times a month. Other people may go months or years in between attacks. During a Meniere's episode, a person may also have nausea and vomiting, and they may not be able to walk or function. Because the symptoms are not consistent or predictable, many people experience frustration, anxiety, and depression because they cannot plan and control their lives.

How does Meniere's Disease progress?

In the beginning stages of the disease, people experience episodes of vertigo and hearing loss or tinnitus, but return to normal between the episodes. As the disease progresses over many months or years, low-frequency hearing loss may still be there between episodes. In the later stage, significant low- and high-frequency hearing loss may always be there and the person may have a constant feeling of imbalance.

What is the treatment for Meniere's Disease?

There is no known cure for Meniere's disease. However, some medical treatments and lifestyle changes can often help people feel better. Because the disease is thought to be caused by fluid build-up in the inner ear, steps to reduce the fluid in the body will sometimes help control symptoms. For example, doctors may prescribe diuretics (water pills) and a low-sodium diet. A balanced lifestyle can help people with Meniere's disease to cope and reduce the intensity or frequency of attacks. This could include eating a well-balanced diet with frequent small meals, regular exercise, consistent and enough sleep, stress-relieving practices such as tai chi, meditation, guided imagery, or yoga, and limiting caffeine and alcohol. Doctors may also prescribe medicines for vertigo and nausea to use during an attack.



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In severe cases, treatment to control the vertigo could include placing a strong medicine into the inner ear that damages the sensory cells. These treatments are considered carefully. The patient must take into account the severity and frequency of vertigo attacks, and the potential adverse effects of treatment. These treatments can lead to good control of episodes and improved symptoms. Hearing aids may be needed for hearing loss.

How can physical therapists help in the management of Meniere's Disease?

Physical therapists can teach people about the lifestyle changes mentioned above. If episodes are bad enough that a person needs help walking, therapists can help make recommendations for safety to manage the episodes of dizziness and imbalance. If someone starts to have dizziness, motion sickness, or imbalance in between episodes, physical therapists can help improve these symptoms with certain exercises. Physical therapists may also help in the recovery after the medical procedure mentioned above that damages the sensory cells. Recovery after these procedures is usually very good.



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