

Mal de Débarquement Syndrome (MDDS)

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Patient Fact Sheet

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What is MDDS?

Individuals with MDDS report dizziness and imbalance after returning from being on a prolonged voyage, such as after taking a cruise, or a long boat or car ride. MDDS is more common in women than men.

Symptoms:

- Dizzy, rocking or swaying sensation when you are still
- No sensation of spinning vertigo
- Off balance feeling when back on land
- May last weeks to months or even longer

What are possible causes of MDDS?

Identifying the exact cause of MDDS is still ongoing. The most common potential causes are listed below.

- The vestibular system (inner ear) does not properly adjust when back on land
- A type of migraine
- Hormonal changes
- Genetics

How do I know that I have MDDS?

There is no exact test or scan to identify MDDS. Diagnosis of MDDS occurs by ruling out other causes of dizziness and imbalance.

- Symptoms start within 48 hours after a prolonged travel (cruise, plane ride, boats)
- Symptoms decrease or go away when in motion (walking, driving)

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How can physical therapy help my symptoms due to MDDS?

Vestibular Physical Therapy may help some patients with MDDS. Treatments are aimed to help the brain readjust to the information from the inner ear, eyes and feet when back on land. Optokinetic protocols may help decrease symptoms in some patients. These protocols involve watching moving patterns, like stripes or dots on a screen or wall, while keeping your head still or while performing head movement.

Is there medication to help treat for MDDS?

There are no standard medications that will resolve your symptoms and imbalance due to MDDS. Certain antidepressants, seizure or anxiety medications can help with symptom reduction. Very small amounts of medication for anxiety taken before getting on and during a cruise or a flight may prevent MDDS. Other medications like Dramamine, meclizine & scopolamine, which are used to treat other forms of dizziness, generally do not help in reducing the rocking sensation in patients with MDDS.

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