Meniere's Disease

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Patient Fact Sheet

Produced by

VESTIBULAR REHABILITATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP
Academy of Neurologic Physical Therapy

A Special Interest Group of

ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGIC PHYSICAL THERAPY

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What is Meniere's Disease?

Meniere's disease is an inner ear disorder that causes repeated episodes of:

1) dizziness that feels like the room is spinning (vertigo)
2) hearing that comes and goes
3) ringing in the ears, and
4) fullness or pressure in the ear.

These spells, or attacks, start suddenly and last for minutes to hours. Most people do not have 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 usually starts at ages 40-60 years of age.

The severity of symptoms may be different with each episode and between people. Some people have episodes weekly, others may not have them for months or years. During a Meniere's episode, a person may have nausea and vomiting, and they may not be able to walk or perform their daily activities. The attacks are not predictable, so people may get frustrated, anxious, and depressed.

How does Meniere's Disease progress?

In the beginning stages of the disease, people have episodes of spinning, ear fullness, temporary hearing loss and ringing in their ears. As the disease progresses over months or years, people may start to lose the ability to hear low-pitch sounds between episodes. There can also be damage to the balance (vestibular) part of the inner ear causing dizziness and difficulty walking.

What is the treatment for Meniere's Disease?

Conservative Treatments:

- Well-balanced diet with frequent small meals
- Limit caffeine and alcohol
- Regular aerobic exercise
- Stress reducing activities: yoga, meditation, deep breathing
- Low-sodium diets or diuretics (water pills)

Non-Conservative Treatments:

- Medicine (gentamicin) is sometimes put through the eardrum into the inner ear. It damages balance sensory cells, which can help stop the attacks. Sometimes more than one treatment is needed.
- Surgery on the inner ear nerve can cut the connection to the brain, which can also help to stop the attacks.

These procedures cause permanent damage to the inner ear system. They are performed only after other methods have not worked. Imbalance and dizziness may get worse, but physical therapy will help with recovery.

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

- Physical therapists (PTs) can help with the conservative treatments and lifestyle modifications noted above.
- Between episodes, people who have trouble with balance, walking, or focusing their eyes are referred to vestibular physical therapy. PTs can provide treatment to help keep eyes steady during movement, improve balance, and support staying active between attacks.
- After injections or surgery, the episodes usually stop, but vestibular PT can still help with any leftover balance or dizziness problems.

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