

Ménière's Disease: The Facts

What is Ménière's Disease?

Ménière's Disease is a vestibular (inner ear) disorder resulting from abnormal amounts of fluid in the inner ear. The condition is characterized by four major symptoms which include; vertigo (dizziness and imbalance), fluctuating hearing loss, ear fullness, and tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Other symptoms that may coincide with the above include fatigue, nausea, anxiety, migraine headaches, depression, sensitivity to sound, confusion, and disorientation. While the majority of individuals are only affected in one ear, it is possible for both ears to be affected. The latter, however, is rare.

Individuals suffering from Ménière's experience spontaneous attacks in which they lose balance control, often unable to walk or stand. These attacks can last up to 24 hours, leaving the individual extremely weak, or fatigued, and often requiring significant amounts of sleep or rest to recover from the attack. While some individuals experience none of the symptoms between attacks, others may still experience some symptoms, such as tinnitus, between attacks. These attacks are unpredictable, and the severity can be debilitating, leaving many sufferers feeling depressed, disoriented, and even helpless.

What Causes Ménière's Disease?

While there is currently no specific cause for Ménière's Disease, research has been done in an attempt to determine its origins. While it is known that Ménière's Disease is marked by heightened levels of the fluid endolymph in the membranous labyrinth (one of two parts forming the labyrinth, a part of the inner ear, the other being the bony labyrinth), some researchers believe the increased levels of endolymph cause the labyrinth to rupture. When this occurs, it is suggested that the endolymph mixes with another inner ear fluid called perilymph causing the symptoms of Ménière's Disease.

At the same time, migraine headaches, infections, fatigue, loud noises, head injuries, and allergies are a few of many other possible causes that have been investigated. Some have even suggested that Ménière's Disease is the result of an auto-immune condition, or basically, the body working against itself. While the exact cause still remains unknown, there continues to be research done to determine its exact origins and discover methods of reducing or eliminating the symptoms.

Treating Ménière's Disease

While it is impossible to cure Ménière's Disease, there have been many attempts at subduing the symptoms to a bearable level. While some treatments work better than others, the effectiveness of any treatment varies by individual. For some, partaking in various treatments has substantially diminished the symptoms. For others, the symptoms have almost diminished completely. Some individuals, however, find that the treatment does little and continue to be severely affected by the symptoms. Here are some of the possible treatments for dealing with Ménière's*;

- **Medication**
Some doctors choose to prescribe various medication to ease the symptoms. These include medication for nausea, sedatives to aid routine activities, and diuretics or water pills to cope with the dizziness brought about by the vertigo attacks. Any form of medication should be taken under the recommendation and supervision of your physician.
- **Surgery**
There are various surgical procedures that are an option for sufferers of Ménière's. However, surgery is seen as a last resort, and reserved for those whose symptoms are so debilitating they

cannot lead normal lives. All of the procedures involve surgery in the inner ear, and as such come with a heightened risk of hearing loss. One surgical option involves implanting a shunt into the ear to drain excess fluid. Another option involves the destruction of the vestibular nerve which controls balance so that it can no longer send distorted messages to the brain. The latter option however, involves permanent hearing loss in the affected ear, making it a very difficult decision for most.

- **Diet**

A common treatment is the implementation of a low-salt, or no-salt diet. Ménière's Disease affects the regulation of sodium levels in the body. Therefore, an individual's sodium intake can have a huge impact on the likelihood of an attack. By eliminating sodium from their diet, individuals suffering from Ménière's have seen a significant difference in the frequency and intensity of their attacks.

At the same time, it is recommended to cut out substances such as nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol, as they too may trigger attacks.

- **Vitamins and Supplements**

Some claim various vitamins and supplements naturally restore undernourished cells in the body which may aid in controlling Ménière's attacks. As with any natural remedy, it is best to use under the recommendation/supervision of a physician.

- **Stress Reduction**

As stress is seen as another possible trigger for Ménière's attacks, partaking in activities that practice stress reducing behavior may help avoid triggering attacks during periods where an individual's stress level would be high. As the disease itself is very stressful, learning these stress coping strategies could potentially reduce the likelihood of frequent attacks. (For ideas on stress reduction follow this link: <http://www.chha.ca/chha/projects-zen.php>)

**Please note this list is not exhaustive, nor an adequate form of medical advice. This list is for educational purposes only. Should you be experiencing symptoms of Ménière's Disease, it is important to consult your doctor to ensure you receive proper diagnosis and treatment.*

Sources

About.com

- http://seniorhealth.about.com/library/conditions/bl_meniere2.htm

Canadian Academy of Audiologists

- <http://www.canadianaudiology.ca>

Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists

- <http://www.caslpa.ca>

Ménière's Disease Information and Resources

- <http://www.menieres-disease.ca>

Meniett

- <http://www.meniett.com/index.html>

Vestibular Disorders Association

- <http://www.vestibular.org/vestibular-disorders/specific-disorders/meniere92s-disease.php>