



Meniere's Disease

What is Meniere's Disease?

Meniere's Disease is a balance disorder characterised by vertigo (spinning) or dizziness, tinnitus (ringing/buzzing sound in the ear), pressure in the ear and hearing loss.

It occurs in about 1/2500 people and is named after a French Doctor who first linked vertigo and inner ear disorders in 1861. Onset is most commonly between 20-50 years old.

What causes Meniere's Disease?

The exact cause of Meniere's disease is unknown but is thought to be related to an abnormal build-up of fluid in the inner ear. This fluid moves over cells in the inner ear that sends information to the brain about position of the head in space and sound. Fluid in the inner ear contains specific concentrations of electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. In Meniere's Disease, the volume and concentration of salts and fluid can fluctuate, this may cause irreversible damage to the inner ear with time.

What symptoms can you have?

- Vertigo, usually lasts several hours. Often associated with dizziness, nausea, vomiting and imbalance
- Tinnitus a ringing/buzzing sound in the ear that isn't associated with an external noise
- Hearing loss which can fluctuate
- Blocked ear or pressure sensation in the ear

How is a diagnosis made?

Your doctor will take a thorough history. Examination is difficult during the current COVID crisis. You may also have a hearing test with an audiologist or alternatively we will ask you to do a screening hearing test on your phone after downloading an app.

How is Meniere's Disease treated?

One of the main treatments of Meniere's disease is diet modification to reduce salt (sodium) intake. The reason behind this is to maintain body fluid levels to reduce the fluctuations in the inner ear fluid levels.

The principles behind a low salt diet include:

- 1) Eat more fresh food: including fresh fruit, vegetables, fresh meat, fish and poultry, unsalted nuts and milk.
- 2) Avoiding processed foods. Take care, many breakfast cereals are high in salt as well as bread.
- 3) Choose foods low in salt: sodium level not above 120mg/100g (check the packaging)

It is also recommended that people with Meniere's disease avoid caffeine and alcohol which can further change the volume of fluid in the inner ear.

Medication can also be prescribed which your doctor will discuss with you. Other treatment options can also be offered if diet and medications fail.

More information on Meniere's Disease:

Meniere's Australia is a support group. Their website provides information on Meniere's disease as well as how to find support for the disease.

www.menieres.org.au

Healthy Living, information on salt intake

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/salt>