16 Natural Ways to Manage Meniere's Disease Symptoms



MENIERE'S DISEASE 16 Ways to Help Manage This Inner Ear Disorder



The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders estimates that 615,000 people in the United States have been diagnosed with Meniere's disease, and nearly 50,000 new cases are being diagnosed each year. While the medical community doesn't know why we are seeing an increase in cases, research continues to look for a cure. Current studies are examining stress management, steroid use, new imaging practices, surgical approaches, and natural treatments.

While a definitive cause has yet to be determined, it does seem to most often strike those in mid-life — somewhere between the ages of 30 and 60. This disease can cause significant challenges, adversely affect one's quality of life, and when severe, can be debilitating. Every person diagnosed will experience this disease differently. Finding a Meniere's disease treatment that improves the symptoms and, most importantly, improves the overall quality of life, is essential.

What Is Meniere's Disease?

Meniere's disease is a chronic, and — at least for now — incurable inner ear disorder that causes dizziness, tinnitus, vertigo and other symptoms typically associated with the abnormal fluid collection in the inner ear. This condition can come on quite suddenly and remain for years. Or a single attack may be separated by weeks, months, or even years.

Permanent hearing loss is possible. It's one of the most frightening complications that Meniere's disease can present. This potentially disabling inner ear condition can also disrupt everyday activities and your profession as common symptoms, dizziness and vertigo specifically, can make it impossible to drive, operate machinery or equipment. And, it can result in stumbles and traumatic falls. (1)

Signs & Symptoms of Meniere's Disease

Symptoms can vary quite significantly from person to person. While some individuals afflicted may experience all the symptoms mentioned here, many people will experience only a few. In addition, the symptoms may come and go, or they may remain for years, causing significant physical and emotional distress. This really is a very personal disease as no two people will experience it in the same manner.

Common symptoms of this disease include: (2)

- Vertigo: Experiencing an overwhelming sensation that the world around you is rocking, spinning, flip-flopping, or twisting, or a feeling that you are moving or spinning is called <u>vertigo</u>. These sensations of movement may last a couple of minutes or may remain for several hours, and they may be disabling when severe. Balance is extremely compromised, and the utmost of care must be taken to ensure you don't fall or cause an accident. Even after vertigo symptoms ebb, an overall sense of imbalance can last for hours or days.
- **Dizziness**: While less severe than vertigo, dizziness upon rising, when walking, when riding an escalator, or walking up and down stairs may occur. Take precautions if you experience any symptoms listed here as you can easily lose your equilibrium and balance. Dizziness can worsen with sudden starts and stops, typical of being in a moving vehicle.
- Hearing loss: Early in this disease, hearing loss of low frequencies often occurs. For some, it is limited to a single ear. Others may experience hearing loss in both ears. The severity of the loss may progress with the disease, leading to permanent hearing loss.
 Individuals with periods of remission may experience an improvement in their hearing between attacks.
- Nausea, vomiting and digestive distress: During an attack with vertigo or dizziness, nausea and vomiting are common. Sipping herbal tea or sucking on ginger lozenges may help to relieve **nausea**. Diarrhea and general abdominal pain or discomfort may also occur.

- **Pressure in the ear**: Many people with this inner ear condition experience a general pressure and discomfort in one or both ears.
- **Tinnitus:** One of the more unsettling and distressing symptoms is **tinnitus**, a constant ringing, buzzing, hissing, roaring, whistling or chirping in the ear. For some individuals, the symptoms may worsen as the disease progresses. While troubling and annoying, it is not considered dangerous. Some prescription medications may make the symptoms worse, including aspirin, certain antibiotics, cancer drugs, and some antidepressants. Talk to your medical team about your symptoms and if there are medications you can substitute that may lessen the tinnitus symptoms. (<u>3</u>)
- Uncontrollable eye movements: Nystagmus is when eyes move rapidly and uncontrollably from side to side, up and down, or in circles. This is sometimes referred to as "dancing eyes." When associated with Meniere's disease, eye movements are caused by abnormal function in the labyrinth of the inner ear that senses movement and position.

Meniere's Disease Causes & Risk Factors

The cause of Meniere's disease remains unknown, and it strikes both women and men equally, with symptoms beginning between ages 30 to 50. There is some evidence that abnormal fluid in the inner ear may trigger the disease. Some conditions that may affect the fluid levels in the inner ears and are considered risk factors for this disease include: (<u>4</u>)

- <u>Chronic Stress</u>
- Abnormal immune system response
- Smoking
- <u>Migraines</u>
- Alcohol use
- Allergies: Both food allergies and seasonal allergies

- Genetics: A family history of the disease
- Illness: A recent viral infection, head cold, or sinus infection
- Certain prescription medications

Conventional Treatment

To determine if you have this disease, and get the best Meniere's disease treatment for your symptoms, an otolaryngologist, or ENT, will discuss the symptoms you experience and your medical history. Typically, a variety of tests will be ordered. They may include a hearing assessment, a balance assessment, and imaging tests, such as an MRI, to rule out **multiple sclerosis**, a brain tumor, or another condition that presents with similar symptoms. (<u>5</u>)

While there is no cure for the disease, treatments are available to help manage the symptoms. For example, if you often experience vertigo, your doctor may prescribe a motion sickness medication. While if you experience extreme nausea, you may receive a prescription for anti-nausea drugs. Other common conventional Meniere's disease treatments include: $(\underline{6})$

- **Diuretics:** Diuretics may be prescribed to help control dizziness by reducing the amount of fluid the body retains. Certain prescription diuretics carry the potential for side effects, including a loss of potassium, low sodium levels, dizziness, headaches, muscle cramps, thirst, and increased blood glucose levels. Talk to your physician about any side effects you experience. (<u>7</u>)
- Salt-restricted diet: As excess sodium levels are associated with fluid retention, a salt-restricted diet is often recommended by physicians. Typically a diet of with less than 2,000 milligrams is suggested.
- **Hearing aid:** If hearing loss is present in one or both ears, an audiologist will work with you to determine best options available.

Technology has improved hearing aids over the last decade, and discussing all available options with an audiologist may help you hear better.

- **Meniett device:** When vertigo is a problem, a <u>Meniett device</u> may be used to apply pulses of pressure to the ear canal to improve inner ear fluid exchange. Treatments are done at home, generally three times each day. Research indicates it improves vertigo, tinnitus, and pressure in the ear for those with the disease.
- **Rehabilitation:** Vestibular rehabilitation may be recommended to help improve balance between episodes. Rehab of this type may help to prevent falls and give you a better sense of well-being.
- **Injections:** An injection of the antibiotic gentamicin into your ear may reduce the frequency and severity of vertigo attacks; however, hearing loss is a known risk of this procedure. An injection of the steroid dexamethasone is considered less effective than the antibiotic injection, but it is less likely to cause further loss of hearing.

What Is MENIERE'S DISEASE?

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COMMON SYMPTOMS

VERTIGO

Experiencing an overwhelming sense that the world around you is rocking, spinning, flip-flopping, or twisting, or a feeling that you are moving or spinning is called vertigo.

DIZZINESS

While less severe than vertigo, dizziness upon rising, when walking, when riding an escalator, or walking up and down stairs may occur.

HEARING LOSS

Early in this disease, hearing loss of low frequencies often occurs. For some, it's limited to a single ear. Others may experience hearing loss in both ears.

NAUSEA, VOMITING & DIGESTIVE DISTRESS

During an attack with vertigo or dizziness, nausea and vomiting are common.







PRESSURE IN THE EAR

Many people with this inner ear condition experience a general pressure and discomfort in one or both ears.

TINNITUS

One of the more distressing symptoms is tinnitus, a constant ringing, buzzing, hissing, roaring, whistling or chirping in the ear.

UNCONTROLLABLE EYE MOVEMENTS

Nystagmus is when eyes move rapidly, and uncontrollably from side to side, up & down, or in circles. This is sometimes referred to as "dancing eyes."

"DROP ATTACK"

A "drop attack" may occur with severe vertigo or dizziness that results in a fall.

DURING AN ATTACK: Lie down or sit still when dizzy or experiencing vertigo









Do not drive a vehicle, ride a bike, climb stairs or a ladder, or ride an escalator while dizzy or experiencing vertigo



Do not operate heavy machinery or household items like a chain saw, electric knife, or other potentially dangerous equipment during an episode



According to the National Institute of Health, scientists believe that as many as 6 out of 10 people can get better on their own, or control their symptoms using a combination of diet, drugs and devices. However, a small percentage may require surgery to get relief. Common surgeries include: (8)

- Endolymphatic sac procedure: To alleviate vertigo, a surgical procedure that decreases fluid production or increases fluid absorption may be performed. During the endolymphatic sac procedure, a portion of bone is removed, and a shunt may be placed with a tube to drain excess fluid from the inner ear.
- Labyrinthectomy: Only performed on those with near-total hearing loss, a labyrinthectomy procedure removes the part of the inner ear responsible for balance. This causes a loss of hearing in the affected ear. This procedure is done to encourage the other ear to take over balance and hearing functions. It should not be entered into without significant consideration and consultation.
- **Vestibular nerve section:** For those with extreme vertigo symptoms, this surgical procedure requires the cutting of the nerve that connects the balance and movement sensors (vestibular nerve) in the ear that

connect to the brain. This surgical procedure can correct vertigo and preserve hearing; however, it does require general anesthesia and at least one overnight in the hospital.

16 Natural Ways to Manage Meniere's Disease

As there is no known cure for the disease, managing the troubling symptoms is key.

The Vestibular Disorders Association recommends these dietary considerations for a Meniere's disease healthy diet that supports the regulation of fluid balances. (<u>9</u>)

1. Limit salt. Excess salt may increase fluid retention, worsening the symptoms of this disease. Sodium intake affects fluid levels in the body and how the body regulates them. Avoid <u>high-sodium foods</u> and limit total sodium intake to 1,000 to 2,000 milligrams daily (about one-half teaspoon to 1 teaspoon). Spread out the consumption equally throughout the day.

2. Limit caffeine. For those with tinnitus, caffeine, even in small amounts, may make tinnitus louder — and you more miserable. Pay attention to your body and, if your symptoms worsen after consuming caffeine, eliminate it from your diet. This includes coffee, black tea and green tea.

3. Limit alcohol. Drinking alcohol, even in small amounts, can adversely affect the inner ear by changing the composition and volume of fluid. Save alcohol for special occasions, or eliminate it all together.

4. Don't use tobacco. In addition to the myriad of other health conditions that tobacco can cause, for those with this disease, the nicotine found in tobacco products (and smoking cessation products) can increase symptoms as nicotine decreases the blood supply to the inner ear by constricting blood vessels.

5. Balance food and liquid intake. Food and liquid intake should be evenly distributed throughout the day with no one meal having more food or liquid than another. In addition, each day should mimic the next with quantity and type of food and liquid consumed each day. Evenly spacing consumption of food and beverages helps to stabilize inner-ear fluid levels.

6. Avoid high-sugar foods and beverages. This includes fruit juices, sodas, desserts and snacks. Sugar can cause fluctuations in the volume of bodily fluids, increasing symptoms. But, don't even think about replacing natural sugars with **artificial sweeteners**; this can cause even greater problems with fluid levels and cause long-lasting adverse health effects.

7. Avoid foods you are allergic or sensitive to. A study published in *Otolaryngology Head Neck Surgery Journal* found that patients treated with a desensitization protocol and diet showed significant improvements in both allergy and Meniere's disease symptoms. In addition, frequency, severity, and interference of everyday activities appeared better after treatment with researchers noting the inner ear may be the target, indirectly or directly, of an allergic reaction. (<u>10</u>)

Try an **<u>elimination diet</u>** after you have been diagnosed to help determine your food sensitivities. Common allergens removed from the diet, and then reintroduced one at a time, include: gluten, dairy, soy, sugar, peanuts, corn, eggs, alcohol and processed foods. While not an easy process, if it relieves the troubling symptoms, then it is well worth the journey. In addition to dietary considerations, there are a variety of other natural treatments that can help reduce the symptoms and improve your quality of life after diagnosis.

8. Manage stress. Effectively <u>reducing stress naturally</u> may lessen the severity of the symptoms. This disease takes a toll, physically and emotionally, and as we know, emotional stress does impact the body, causing hormonal changes that may increase your risk for heart disease, obesity, diabetes, certain autoimmune diseases, digestive disorders, and even certain types of cancer.

9. Sound & Music Therapy. A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Neurology* found that the sound of streams, rain, waterfalls, and wind can decrease tinnitus-related activity. The same is not true for chirping birds or bugs. The sound should be pleasing and just in the background. In addition, **music therapy** may help to improve blood flow in the inner ear and facilitate relaxation while reducing stress. Finding the right blend of nature sounds and music may help reduce your symptoms. (<u>11</u>)

10. Breathing Exercises. To improve sleep length and quality, reduce anxiety, and lower stress, practice **breathing exercises** whenever you feel anxious and before bed.

11. Group support. This disease affects the real essence of life and can be debilitating. Finding support within a community that suffers with similar symptoms can help you build effective coping strategies. This is particularly important for those recently diagnosed. Find a support group near you through the <u>Vestibular Disorders Association</u>. Connecting with a community is essential for any chronic illness but particularly for one that has symptoms as debilitating as this condition.

One-on-one counseling can also help you learn to adjust to your new reality while also learning effective stress-busting techniques when tinnitus or vertigo symptoms flare.

12. Foam rolling. To improve circulation and blood flow, as well as reduce stress, doing **foam roller** exercises that are known to help facilitate myofascial release may be beneficial in reducing troublesome symptoms.

13. Massage. Deep tissue **massage** focusing on the stretching and massage of the neck is associated with significant improvements in tinnitus, according to a study published in the *Journal of Manipulative Physiological Therapeutics*. In addition to deep tissue massage, **reiki**, craniosacral therapy, and lymphatic drainage massage may help to increase circulation and reduce fluid buildup. Test a variety of different massage techniques to find the one that best alleviates your symptoms. (<u>12</u>)

14. Acupuncture. A study published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* found that <u>acupuncture</u> helped to alleviate vertigo symptoms. In this small study, four acupuncture sessions were conducted every other day and then one week later. Significant improvement was shown after the first session. Vertigo symptoms ceased after the second session. Six months later, the patient remained symptomfree. Researchers stress that further clinical and laboratory research is needed. (<u>13</u>)

Another study also found that acupuncture has a positive effect on controlling vertigo for those with Meniere's disease. However, no improvement in hearing was experienced. (<u>14</u>)

15. Allergy Relief. As mentioned above, allergies play a role in the amount of fluid in the ears and are considered a risk factor for developing this disease. If you have **seasonal allergies**, adding a touch of raw, local honey to your diet is beneficial. In fact, research shows that raw honey is significantly better at controlling seasonal allergy symptoms than conventional allergy medications. (<u>15</u>)

16. Dandelion Tea. Used for generations, **dandelion tea** is a traditional medicine that greatly increases the frequency of urination, and quickly. Research shows that it is a promising diuretic; however, if you are allergic to ragweed, daisies, chrysanthemums, or marigolds, avoid it as it can trigger an allergic reaction. (<u>16</u>)

Precautions

Some of the symptoms of Meniere's disease mentioned here may also be linked to another underlying medical condition. A recent head injury, middle or inner ear infection, or a more serious condition may be at the root cause of the symptoms. Please seek medical attention for a proper diagnosis. (<u>18</u>)

This disease may cause permanent hearing loss, chronic fatigue, stress, anxiety and depression. Persistent vertigo may be disabling as accidents may occur while driving or operating heavy machinery. A "drop attack" may occur with severe vertigo or dizziness that results in a fall. In the midst of an attack, it is imperative that you stop what you are doing and sit or lie down until the symptoms abate.

During an attack:

- Lie down or sit still when dizzy or experiencing symptoms of vertigo.
- Do not drive a vehicle, ride a bike, climb stairs or a ladder, or ride an escalator while dizzy or experiencing symptoms of vertigo.
- Do not operate heavy machinery or household items like a chain saw, electric knife, or other potentially dangerous equipment during an episode.

Final Thoughts

- Diet plays a significant role and should be a top consideration when seeking an effective Meniere's disease treatment.
- Eating a low-salt diet is essential to help prevent excess fluid from settling in the ears.
- Limit or eliminate alcohol, sugar and caffeine.
- Avoid processed foods high in salt, sugar, monosodium glutamate, and artificial sweeteners.
- Avoid foods that you are allergic to or have a sensitivity to. An elimination diet or comprehensive testing can help you pinpoint foods you should avoid.
- Divide food and drinks into equal portions and balance consumption throughout the day; no single meal should be larger than another.
- Manage stress through talk therapy, massage, essential oils, and deep breathing exercises.
- Acupuncture may help alleviate vertigo symptoms.
- While most people will get better on their own, or control symptoms with diet, drugs, or devices, a small portion of those diagnosed may only get relief through a surgical procedure.
- After experiencing vertigo, your balance may be impaired for hours or even days.

Read Next: How to Prevent Motion Sickness + 13 Natural Treatments