



## MENIERE'S DISEASE INFORMATION

### What Is Meniere's Disease?

Meniere's disease is an abnormality of the inner ear causing a host of symptoms, including dizziness, tinnitus or a ringing in the ears, fluctuating hearing loss, and the sensation of pressure or pain in the affected ear. The disorder usually affects only one ear but in approximately 15% of patients both ears are affected. It is one of the causes of permanent hearing loss. Meniere's disease is also called endolymphatic hydrops.

### What Causes Meniere's Disease?

The symptoms of Meniere's disease are associated with a change in fluid volume within a portion of the inner ear known as the labyrinth. The labyrinth has two parts, the bony labyrinth, and the membranous labyrinth. The membranous labyrinth, which is encased in the bony labyrinth is necessary for hearing and balance. It is filled with a small amount of fluid called endolymph. When your head moves the endolymph moves, causing nerve receptors in the membranous labyrinth to send signals to the brain about the body's motion. An increase in endolymph due to overproduction or inadequate re-absorption can cause the membranous labyrinth to balloon out - a condition known as endolymphatic hydrops. The cause for this overproduction or failed re-absorption is unknown. Suggested causes include environmental factors, such as noise pollution, viral infections, and autoimmune diseases.

### What Are The Symptoms Of Meniere's Disease?

Symptoms usually occur suddenly and can arise daily or as infrequently as once a year. Dizziness will usually force you to lie down. These attacks can lead to nausea, vomiting, and sweating and often come on with little to no warning.

Some individuals with Meniere's disease have attacks that start with tinnitus, a loss of hearing, or a full feeling or pressure in the affected ear. It is important to remember that all of these symptoms are unpredictable. The frequency, duration, and intensity varies from person to person. Additional symptoms may include headaches, abdominal discomfort and diarrhea. A person's hearing tends to partially recover between attacks but over time becomes worse.

### How Is Meniere's Disease Treated?

There is no cure for Meniere's disease. Medical and behavior therapy, however, are often helpful in managing its symptoms. Some doctors may recommend surgery. During this procedure a tiny silicone tube is inserted into the inner ear to drain off excess fluid. Another operative procedure is vestibular neurectomy, the vestibular nerve which serves balance is severed so that it no longer sends distorted messages to the brain. Another surgery is a labyrinthectomy, the removal of the membranous labyrinth, is an irreversible procedure that is often successful in eliminating the dizziness associated with Meniere's disease. This procedure, however, results in a total loss of hearing in the operated ear - an important consideration since the second ear may one day be affected. Risks of surgery include bleeding, scarring, infection, reaction to anesthesia, and hearing loss.



### **Suggested Dietary Changes**

Some doctors recommend a change in diet to help control the symptoms. Eliminating caffeine, alcohol, and salt may relieve the frequency and intensity of attacks. See the attached Furstenberg Diet for Meniere's Disease. Eliminating tobacco use and reducing stress levels may also lessen the severity of attacks. Medications that either control allergies, reduce fluid retention, or improve circulation in the inner ear may help.

### **Where Can I get More Information?**

For more information about Meniere's disease you may contact:

American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery One  
Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Telephone (703)836-4444

Vestibular Disorders Association  
1015 N W. 22nd Avenue  
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Telephone (503) 229-7705

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication  
Disorders  
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Washington, DC 20013-7777  
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