VEDA
LIFE REBALANCED

TREATMENT

DIZZINESS & NAUSEA

Stress management, including breathing & relaxation exercises, can help you manage your symptoms.

ARTICLE

022

DID THIS ARTICLE HELP YOU? SUPPORT VEDA @ VESTIBULAR.ORG

5018 NE 15th Ave.
Portland, OR 97211
1-800-837-8428
info@vestibular.org
vestibular.org

Controlling Your Symptoms:

How to Reduce Dizziness & Nausea from Vestibular Disorders

By Professor Lucy Yardley

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT DIZZINESS AND NAUSEA

Why do I feel dizzy and nauseous?

The balance system relies on three different senses. Using your eyes you can see where you are and where you are going. Using the sensors in your body you can feel where you are and how you are moving. And the balance organ in your inner ear (which doctors sometimes refer to as the vestibular organ or labyrinth) senses whenever your head moves.

Your brain acts like a computer, combining signals from these three senses to give you a stable picture of the world and control your head, body and eye movements. If any part of this balance system is giving out unusual or faulty information then you may feel dizzy, disoriented or unsteady.

When your brain senses that your balance system is not able to give you a stable picture of the world, it send signals to the system which controls automatic body reflexes to make you feel or actually be sick. Nobody knows exactly why dizziness triggers nausea or sickness, but it may be that your body thinks the dizziness is due to something you have eaten, which your body is trying to get rid of.

How can stress affect my dizziness and nausea?

Recent studies have shown that your body is less able to cope with dizziness when you are under stress, and so you may become more dizzy and sick than if you were stress-free. One reason for this is that the system which triggers nausea and sickness controls all automatic body reflexes, including the 'fight or flight' stress reflex. When you are under stress your body automatically gets ready to fight or run away, by triggering lots of changes such as making you breathe faster, speeding up your heart, and pumping blood to your muscles. The side effect of these changes is that you tend to get dizzy and sick more easily , which is why even healthy people often feel dizzy and sick when they are under great

stress (e.g. sudden injury). So if your balance system is not working normally and you are under stress you will feel twice as dizzy and sick.
Another problem for people with dizziness is that their symptoms can cause stress, but then stress can actually make the symptoms worse. You may have noticed that you often feel more dizzy when you are under stress. The reason for this is that when your brain is busy coping with the stress it is less able to also deal with the faulty signals from your balance system.

What can I do to reduce my dizziness and nausea?

The bad news is that there is no medicine which can make the balance system work normally. Your doctor may be able to give you tablets to ease the dizziness and nausea, but these will not cure the problem, and should not be taken all the time. The good news is that you can help to reduce your dizziness and nausea by reducing your stress levels, using the methods in this book.

How do the methods in this book reduce dizziness and nausea?

One way to stop stress making your dizziness and nausea worse is to use the methods in this book which block the fight or flight reflex. These methods are controlled breathing (which slows down you breathing and reduces nausea) and relaxation (which works by relaxing your muscles and slowing your heart rate).

Another way to stop stress making your dizziness and nausea worse is to try to reduce the stress itself. You can do this by trying to change your lifestyle to make it less stressful (stress management). If it is the dizziness which is causing you most stress, then you may find it helpful to get your mind off your symptoms using methods of thought control. If your life and the way you think is free of stress, then your body will not add stress symptoms to your illness.

How can I tell if these stress reduction methods will help me?

All the methods of stress reduction in this book have been used for many years to treat patients with severe incurable symptoms which are made worse by stress, such as pain. Scientific studies have shown that these methods do help to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. To find out whether these exercises are right for you, simply try out the exercises! They certainly cannot do you any harm – it is only by trying them that you will know for sure whether or not they can help you.

CARRYING OUT METHODS OF STRESS REDUCTION: HOW TO CHOSE THE RIGHT STRESS REDUCTION METHODS FOR YOU

The causes and effects of stress are different for different people. The page tells you how to choose the stress reduction methods which will suit you.

For all the methods you will need to find ten minutes once or twice a day to work on reducing your stress. Decide now on times when you can put these methods into practice each day, and write the times down in the diary at the back of this book. Next choose a place to do this – somewhere that you can be relaxed and quiet, without any interruptions.

Now you need to choose which methods to try. Read the list of stress methods on the next page, and tick the ones you will try first in the diary at the back of this book – don't try to do more than two at first. Write down your levels of stress and symptoms at the same time.

Do this once every week, so that you can see if the methods you are using are helping to reduce your stress and symptoms, and can decide what methods you will try the next week. All these methods take time to learn, and you will have good days and bad days at first – if you keep trying you will soon find one that works for you.

WEEK	1	2
Controlled breathing	✓	
Relaxation	✓	✓
Thought control		
Stress management		✓
Symptoms	3	2
Stress	2	1

Controlled breathing

Controlled breathing can be helpful for everyone who feels nausea or sickness. Also, if you often feel out of breath, and find yourself panting, sighing, gasping or yawning for no reason, then you are over-breathing and need to practice slower breathing.

Relaxation

You need to carry out relaxation exercises if your muscles are tense. Check now whether your jaw and hands are relaxed. Try shrugging your shoulders and moving them backwards and forwards. If your teeth are clenched together, your hands are tense, or your neck and shoulders feel stiff, then relaxation will help you.

Thought control

If you find it difficult to stop thinking about your symptoms, or feel anxious or unhappy about them, then you may be helped by some methods of thought control which people with other symptoms, such as pain, have found useful.

Stress management

If you have a lot of stress in your life as well as your dizziness and nausea, or if you find that the dizziness gets worse in stressful situations, then you may find it useful to try methods of reducing stresses which are adding to your problems.

More details of all these methods are given in the following pages.

CONTROLLED BREATHING

First sit or lie down in a comfortable place, loosen any tight clothing, and close your eyes. Put one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Avoid breathing from the top of your chest – try to keep this still, and just let air in by allowing your stomach to gently rise and fall. Breathe through your nose and allow two seconds as you breathe in and four seconds as you breathe out (you may need to time yourself at first).

At first controlled breathing takes effort and so you need to practice it in a quiet place every day, so that it starts to be a habit which you do not need to think about.

If you find it difficult to breathe this slowly and feel as if you are not getting enough air, then you are over-breathing. This means that you will need to reset the level of oxygen your body is used to. You can do this by holding your breath for 10 seconds. Do not take a deep breath before or after you do this – your body needs to get used to less oxygen.

After you have practised controlled breathing in a quiet place for a few weeks you can start to slow your breathing as you go about your daily life. Practice doing this every day, whenever you feel dizzy or nauseous, or if you start to have symptoms of over-breathing.

RELAXATION

First sit or lie down in a comfortable place, loosen any tight clothing, and close your eyes. It is easiest to relax your muscles if you tense them first. So taking each part of your body listed below in turn, first tense up that body part for five seconds, and then say to yourself 'relax' and let the tension go all at once. Repeat for any part of your body which tenses up again.

BODY PART	HOW TO TENSE
Feet and legs	Press your toes down (left and then right)
Chest and Stomach	Pull your stomach in
Hand and forearm	Clench into a fist (left and then right)
Neck and shoulders	Hunch your shoulders
Cheeks and mouth	Make a face and bite hard
Forehead	Frown

When you do this relaxation exercise, notice how your muscles feel when they are tense and when they are relaxed. Enjoy the feeling of being relaxed. Don't worry if you have worrying or distracting thoughts – just let them come and go. You may find it helps to imagine you are in the most relaxing situation you can think of, such as lying in the sun. Some people find it helps to listen to a relaxing tape, such as gentle music, or waves on a beach. Or you can make yourself a tape of these instructions.

Like controlled breathing, relaxation gets easier when it is a habit you do not need to think about, so you must start by doing it in a quiet place every day.

After you have practiced relaxation for a few weeks you can start to try to relax any part of you that feels tense by just saying to yourself 'relax',

without having to tense your muscles first. When you can do this easily in a quiet place practice doing it in your daily life whenever you feel tense, dizzy or nauseous.

THOUGHT CONTROL

The problem with stress is that it is very hard to keep your mind off it. You find that you cannot help thinking about problems, or paying attention to symptoms. This is a natural reaction, which is useful if the problem can be solved or you need to be alerted to illness. But if you have long-term problems or illness then thinking about them often just makes them worse, and you may need to practice new ways of thinking.

DISTRACTION

If you try to stop thinking about something you will just think about it more – so the best way to distract yourself is to fill your mind with something else. If you feel unwell or stressed, you will feel less bad if you find ways to keep your mind busy with things that interest you. So as soon as you feel stressed or sick, try to find something else to think about – plan what you will do later, look out of the window, watch a good TV program, ring a friend or read the paper.

THOUGHT CHANGING

It is hard to ignore worries, but often it is the things we think that cause stress. So if you can change how you think you will feel less stress.



Take time every day to write down the thoughts which cause you stress. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Are the thoughts worse than your present situation?
- Do you worry about things that may never happen?
- Are you expecting too much of yourself?
- Do you worry if you cannot manage to do everything well, or please everyone?
- Are you worrying about things which you cannot change?
- Do you spend your time wishing that you were not ill, or thinking about the bad things in your life?

If you realize that the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', you have made the first step to stopping those stressful thoughts! Think of reasons to think something different. You could think of all the good things in your past and present, and that may happen in the future. Try talking over your worrying thoughts with a family member or friend – they will often be able to help you to see other ways of thinking. Or imagine that your best friend was thinking this way – what would you say to them?

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Sometimes stress is due to problems which you can solve. These are some methods to help you make your lifestyle less stressful.

Planning

You can plan ways to make a difficult situation less stressful. Take time every day to write down one situation which caused you stress. Next write down ways you could try to change or cope with this situation. Decide which way of changing the situation is best and easiest, and work out how you can carry it out. You need to think about what might stop your plan from working, so that you can also plan to overcome any setbacks. Then try this method of coping with the situation next time it happens. If your plan does not work out quite right the first time, just think about how to improve it and try again.

Time management

Many people find it stressful to cope with all the things they have to do. If you have this problem, first of all write down each day how you have spent your time. Then think about what things are most important to you just now, and how you would spend the time on your ideal day. This will help you to work our what you should cut down or cut out. Don't forget to allow time for rest, and to relax with other people.

Make a list of what needs to be done and when. Then just get on with the jobs which you have listed to do now – you can stop worrying about the things on the list which can be done later, and will feel good when you can tick of the things which you have done!

It is important not to worry if you find you cannot do everything you want when you want to. This just means that you have found the cause of your stress – you need to allow a bit more time for everything to get done.

Doing what you want

Compare the list of things that you do and the things you want to do. Are you doing things for other people that you do not really want to do, and do not need to do? If so, to reduce stress you need to learn how to say 'no' from time to time.

If you find this hard to do, you need to plan ahead what you will say and do and stick to it. There is no need to get angry or to annoy people – you need to talk over the problem calmly and try to find a plan which works for everyone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This booklet was written by Professor Lucy Yardley and produced by the University of Southampton with funding provided by the Ménière's Society. It is recommended for use only after a qualified medical doctor has confirmed that the exercises are safe and appropriate for the individual who will carry them out.

©Professor Lucy Yardley.
The Meniere's Society is the UK registered charity providing support and information to those with dizziness and balance disorders (www.menieres.org.uk).

©2015 Vestibular Disorders Association
VeDA's publications are protected under copyright. For more information, see our permissions guide at vestibular.org. ***This document is not intended as a substitute for professional health care.***

	METHODS Check each method that was used during the week.				**PROGRESS** 0 = None, 1 = Very slight, 2 = Mild, 3 = Strong	
WEEKS	**CONTROLLED BREATHING**	**RELAXATION**	**THOUGHT CONTROL**	**STRESS MANAGEMENT**	**SYMPTOMS**	**STRESS**
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						

NOTES:

VESTIBULAR DISORDERS ASSOCIATION
5018 NE 15th Ave. Portland, OR 97211
1-800-837-8428 info@vestibular.org vestibular.org

Did this free publication from VeDA help you?

You can ensure that educational articles like this continue to be available to vestibular patients like you by making a tax-deductible gift to VeDA today.

SUPPORT VEDA

One-time gift: ☐ $40 ☐ $50 ☐ $75 ☐ $100 ☐ $250 ☐ other

Monthly gift: ☐ $10 ☐ $15 ☐ $25 ☐ $35 ☐ $50 ☐ other

☐ Check this box if you prefer that your donation remain anonymous.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Donations gladly accepted online at **http://vestibular.org**. Check or money order in US funds, payable to VeDA.

Visa MC Amex Discover _____ _____ _____
Card number Exp. date CVV code

_____
Billing address of card (if different from mailing information)

MAILING INFORMATION

Name _____ Telephone_____ Email _____
Address _____ City_____ State/Province _____ Zip_____
Country _____