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DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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Meniere's Disease

A Checklist to Help You Cope

By Claire Haddad, Boston Area Support Group Leader & VEDA

Meniere's disease is a chronic, incurable vestibular (inner ear) disorder that produces a recurring set of symptoms as a result of abnormally large amounts of fluid called endolymph collecting in the inner ear. The exact cause of Meniere's disease is not known, but some theories include circulation problems, viral infection, allergies, an auto-immune reaction, migraine, and possibly a genetic connection.

There is no "cure" for Meniere's disease, but there are things you can do to manage your symptoms. As always, remember to consult with your doctor before making any changes to your lifestyle that could impact your condition. The following information should not replace the advice of a qualified medical practitioner.

Some suggestions to help you manage your Meniere's symptoms:

✓ **Limit your sodium intake.**

Limit your total sodium intake to 1,000 mg/day total (about a teaspoon). Since there is naturally occurring sodium in many foods it's best to limit additional salt to less than ½ teaspoon (i.e. salt from the salt shaker).

It's also important to eat a consistent level of salt (i.e. eat evenly-spaced meals). It's not a good idea to have no salt and then go out for Chinese food.

Salt is naturally occurring in most foods (e.g. milk, some vegetables, etc.), so you can't completely cut out sodium, nor is it recommended. Avoid canned foods, pasta sauce, soups, packaged foods, fast foods, prepared food, etc.

A great low-salt cookbook is Dr. Furhman's "Eat for Health" (a 2-book set with recipes can be found at Whole Foods or at www.drfurhman.com). It is not explicitly for people with Meniere's, but one focus is to drastically limit added salt intake to about ¼ - ½ teaspoon per day.

If you can, prepare your own meals so you know just how much sodium they contain.



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✓ **Avoid caffeine and alcohol.**

Caffeine and alcohol can dehydrate you, thereby affecting your body's fluid levels.

✓ **Limit sugar intake**

Some people find a connection with sugar so they limit/avoid it. Some people recommend avoiding artificial sweeteners as well, like the ones found in diet sodas, etc.

✓ **Stay well-hydrated.**

Drink water consistently throughout the day. This will help you maintain the fluid levels throughout your body.

✓ **Try a diuretic if the above dietary changes do not help.**

A diuretic can sometimes help balance your body's fluid levels.

✓ **Exercise and stress reduction are a must.**

Many people with Meniere's disease feel better if they do vigorous aerobic exercise on a regular basis (e.g. bike, rowing machine, etc.). Don't over-extend yourself – if you can't physically manage vigorous aerobic exercise do something more low impact, like yoga or walking. If you have trouble walking due to balance problems try using walking poles (sometimes referred to as "Nordic walking poles") to help you maintain your balance. Be safe by choosing a walking route that is flat and well illuminated, and remember to bring water with you to keep you hydrated.

Meniere's Disease can be a real challenge. Most people find ways to cope by adjusting to a "new normal" and discovering and adapting to the limits imposed by their condition.