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MENIERE'S DISEASE

Meniere's disease is an abnormality of the inner ear that causes a host of symptoms including vertigo or severe dizziness, tinnitus or a roaring sound the ears, fluctuating hearing loss, and the sensation of pressure or pain in the affected ear. This condition usually affects only one ear and is a common cause of hearing loss.

The exact cause of Meniere's disease isn't well understood. It appears to be the result of the abnormal volume or composition of fluid in the inner ear, but what factors actually cause these changes in the inner ear fluid is unknown but theories include circulation problems, viral infection, allergies, an autoimmune reaction, migraines and the possibility of a genetic connection. Some people with Meniere's disease find that there are certain triggers that can set off an attack including stress, overwork, fatigue, emotional distress, additional illnesses, pressure changes, certain foods, and excess of salt in diet.

During an attack of Meniere's disease the main symptoms are spontaneous, violent vertigo, fluctuating hearing loss, ear fullness, nausea/vomiting, and/or tinnitus. Some people experience a period of extreme fatigue or exhaustion after the attack that causes a need for hours of sleep. Attacks can last from 20 minutes to 24 hours. They can occur many times per week or they can be separated by weeks, months, or even years. The unpredictable nature of the disease makes it difficult to tell how it will affect ones future. Symptoms can disappear one day and never return, or they might become so severe that they are disabling.

Initial evaluation is based on a very careful history given to the provider as well as an examination under a microscope to rule out obvious infections or any visible growths. Also an audiogram, or hearing evaluation, is taken to determine if there is a low frequency up sloping hearing loss of the neural type is seen indicating Meniere's. Additional testing that may be performed to determine diagnosis of Meniere's may be:

ENG: electronystagmography, or a balance test

ECOG: Electrocochleography

BSER: Brainstem evoked response audiometry

MRI: with contrast dys that can rule out a brain tumor as a possible source of symptoms.

Lab testing: to include examination for any inner ear immune related infections or diseases.

There is no cure for Meniere's disease. However, the symptoms of the disease are often controllable by reducing the body's retention of fluids through dietary changes, such as low or salt free diet and no caffeine/alcohol, or through medication changes or an addition of a diuretic. By eliminating tobacco use and reducing stress levels some people are able to lessen the severity of their symptoms.