**Vestibular Migraine**

**What is Vestibular Migraine? (also known as migraine associated dizziness?)**

About a quarter of people with migraine experience dizziness at some time, making it perhaps the most common cause of dizziness. Many people suffer from vestibular migraine who do not have severe headaches as a dominant symptom. These patients can experience dizziness, balance problems or other physical symptoms similar to motion sickness. The brain can become very sensitive to movement of their head or of the visual environment around them. People with vestibular migraine can also be sensitive to other stimulation like light or sound.

**Why do I get Vestibular Migraine?**

The exact cause of vestibular migraine is still not fully understood. Most people think it is caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain tissues which generates changes in blood flow and chemicals. The tendency to generate this electrical disturbance could be inherited and the addition of other triggers, such as certain foods, stress, sleep disruption etc, could push people over the edge and generate the electrical disturbance that underlies the symptoms. The spreading electrical disturbance in different areas of the brain can cause different symptoms.

**Common Triggers**

Commonly reported migraine trigger factors include hunger, dehydration, stress and changes in routine. However, triggers can be different for everyone and sometimes it can be difficult to identify what has caused it. For example, some people will crave sweet food such as chocolate before the migraine is experienced which leads them to think that chocolate was the ‘trigger’ whereas sometimes the food craving was actually a symptom of the beginning of the migraine. Common triggers include:

* Stress – emotional or physical
* Sleep disruption
* Diet – particularly irregular meals or lack of food; not drinking enough water; alcohol or caffeine.
* Hormonal changes
* Environmental factors – lights; noise; smell; changes in weather; flickering lights (computer, television, etc.); bright sunshine; smoking. Again, it is not always clear whether these are triggers or symptoms of the migraine itself.
* Neck and shoulder tension
* Medication – frequent use of paracetamol / ibuprofen

**What is the treatment for Migraine Associated Dizziness?**

Finding out what triggers an attack and stopping the trigger is the first goal of treatment. It may be helpful to keep a diary to help you identify your own personal trigger factors. When you look back at your diary you may find that a pattern emerges and that changes to your diet or lifestyle can reduce the frequency and severity of your attacks. Try to follow these general rules:

* Regular sleep. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Avoid sleeping in excessively on weekends to catch up on sleep lost during the week.
* Eat regular meals. Try not to skip meals and eat a healthy balanced diet. Again, try to eat at the same time every day.
* Limit caffeine. For people who experience migraine, caffeine 3 or more days per week may make symptoms worse. Avoiding all caffeine is ideal, and at least until any headaches have resolved. Caffeine withdrawal can cause headaches, so cut down on caffeine slowly. Caffeine can sometimes help in the early stages of a headache, which is why it is an ingredient in many over the counter medicines, but this should be limited to not more than 2 days per week.
* Limit painkillers. Taking too many painkillers can make headaches worse! Try to limit pain-relief medicine to no more than two or three times a week or no more than 10 days out of the month.
* Limit alcohol. Alcohol can trigger attacks, particularly red wine, so it is best avoided.
* Moderate exercise. Exercise three to five times a week for at least 20 minutes. This can include a brisk walk or other activities like swimming, Tai Chi or Yoga.
* Relaxation and stress management.

There is a wide range of migraine treatments’ available, including acute treatments to take when an attack strikes, or preventative treatments which are designed to be taken on a daily basis to relieve the frequency and severity of attacks. There are also a range of recommended supplements that you can take that have been proven to be beneficial. In addition, acupuncture has proven to be a successful treatment for many people.

**Can Physiotherapy help me manage my Migraine Associated Dizziness?**

A physiotherapist who specialises in vestibular rehabilitation will provide advice and education about your condition. They will also use exercises designed to help you become less sensitive to activities that provoke your symptoms. You may be given a programme of exercises to carry out at home. Usually the exercise prescription is more conservative than for other vestibular disorders, since they can make symptoms worse. Physiotherapy may have to be delayed if the headaches are too frequent. So, it is important to see a physiotherapist with experience of managing this condition.

Other Sources for information:

[www.migraine.org.uk](http://www.migraine.org.uk)

[www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)

[www.vestibular.org](http://www.vestibular.org)