

Vestibular migraine

also known as 'Migraine associated Vertigo' or 'Migrainous Vertigo'

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net.

What is vestibular migraine?

Vestibular migraine is a type of migraine and is the second most common cause of dizziness. Generally migraines are described as recurrent episodes of severe or intense headaches thought to be caused by a change in blood flow to the brain. Dizziness occurs in 30-40% of migraine patients.

Vestibular migraines may occur with or without a headache along with a number of other debilitating symptoms which can affect the vision, balance and body. As vestibular migraine can strike completely independent of a headache, it can be often missed as a diagnosis or take longer for a diagnosis to be made. If a headache does occur, it can be before the attack of dizziness, during or after.

Migraines are generally more prevalent in females and if there is a history of headaches or migraines in the family. Diagnosis can sometimes be difficult as there is no specific test to identify a migraine.

Symptoms

Dizziness is the main presenting symptom in vestibular migraine. The term dizziness may be used to describe a number of sensations, including spinning, swimming, disorientation, a general imbalance or sensitivity to movement or motion. Symptoms can last from 4 to 72 hours in duration.

- Imbalance, vertigo, intolerance to motion or movement, disorientation usually lasting minutes to hours
- Nausea and or vomiting
- Visual disturbances, including sensitivity to visual stimulus particularly lights (photophobia) or a feeling of blurred vision
- Tinnitus or sensitivity to sounds
- Headache (this can be before, during or after) or no headache at all
- Can have 'aura' prior to migraine starting; for example a pressure in the head, vision changes or sensory sensitivity

Stages of migraine

Migraines often occur in a progressive manner and can be divided into 5 stages. Some people experience all stages and others only some.

1. Pre headache – this can include changes in appetite or energy levels for some people.
2. Aura – this is a sense that a migraine is coming on. Symptoms can include a ‘full’ feeling in the head and/or visual disturbances such as blurred vision, sensitivity to light or difficulty focusing on things.
3. Main attack – this can include stiffness in neck and also any type of headache. Some people experience no headache at all. This usually would be where the most severe symptoms occur, for example dizziness and nausea.
4. Resolution – this stage occurs usually after rest or sleep.
5. Recovery – this stage encompasses the after effects from the migraine including fatigue, weakness and exhaustion.

Potential triggers

Migraines can often be associated with certain ‘triggers’ which are thought to start a migraine.

Lifestyle – including lack of regular exercise or too much exercise.

Food and drink – for example certain cheeses, processed foods, chocolate, nuts, caffeine and alcohol. Irregular meals or long periods without food or drink can also lead to the start of a migraine.

Stress and anxiety – if a person is under a lot of stress, this is also linked to more frequent migraines.

Hormonal – migraines can be linked to hormonal changes and hence a higher incidence in females than males.

Sleep hygiene – including broken sleep, lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns.

Management of symptoms

There are lots of effective ways to stop migraines from progressing and to reduce the frequency of them. These can include:

Symptom diary – trying to identify personal potential triggers as mentioned above.

Vestibular rehabilitation – these can be given by the audiologist to help your brain to compensate for the after effects of a migraine on your balance ability.

Medication – a variety of medications can be prescribed by your GP for preventing migraines and for migraine relief.

Useful links

National Migraine Centre: www.nationalmigrainecentre.org.uk/migraine-and-headaches/migraine-and-headache-factsheets/vestibular-migraine

The Migraine Trust: www.migrainetrust.org

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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