

Vestibular Migraines

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Fact Sheet

Vestibular migraines may occur in people with a diagnosis of migraine headaches. Spells of vertigo (a room spinning sensation), imbalance and nausea are common. Headaches may not happen at the same time. Most people do not know about this type of migraine, but it has been a diagnosis since 2012. It is sometimes called an “atypical” migraine. Symptoms can last seconds, minutes, or hours and may take days to return to your “normal”.

What Are Symptoms of Vestibular Migraines?

- Vertigo
- Lightheaded dizziness, “swimmy” headedness
- Rocking sensation, motion sickness
- Imbalance and difficulty walking
- Spatial disorientation, especially with head motion and in or busy, moving environments.
- Hearing changes, ear pressure, or ringing
- Just not quite “right”

Who Gets Vestibular Migraines?

Women have this type of migraine more than men. They may occur during their monthly cycle or changes in hormones. Usually the first symptoms will begin between the ages of 30 to 50 years. Many people with Meniere’s disease also have atypical migraines. Migraines can run in families and research shows there may be a genetic link. Many people with atypical migraines also have anxiety or motion sickness as a child. Patients with anxiety often respond better if the anxiety is treated at the same time as the migraine

How can Physical Therapy help?

Physical therapy is a major part of treatment for this type of migraine. Most people are afraid to move their head or go out of their home because they might have a spell. The PT can help explain this disorder and importance of staying active. Habituation exercises will be used to reduce your dizzy symptoms and gait and balance exercises will decrease the risk for falls. The exercises are not done during a spell, but are gradually restarted when it is over. The therapist may also give you a list of common triggers to reduce or avoid to decrease the intensity or number of spells.

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