

Travel & Vertigo

Preparing to Travel

Frequent attacks of vertigo, or the uncertainty of when an attack might occur, can be stressful and may make people reluctant to travel.

There are a few **basic steps** which can be taken to make travel a bit easier; whether doing the weekly shop, or off on holiday abroad.



- Stress and tiredness are two of the main factors which can bring on an attack, so plan ahead.
- If possible travel with a friend, relative or colleague who understands and knows what to do in the event of an attack.
- On longer trips have everything prepared a day or two before leaving so you can rest the day before and get a good night's sleep.
- Plan the journey leaving plenty of time for connections, especially between different means of travel. A specific bus service which is run to meet a particular train is a good bet because staff will be aware that people are intending to make a connection.
- Include adequate rest periods when travelling - whether a comfort break or a whole day off.
- If you are deaf or your hearing is poor a 'Hard of hearing, please speak clearly' badge or card can be obtained from some hearing support organisations to alert people to your hearing loss and explain how they can help. Also ensure travel and tour guides know the best way to communicate with you in the event of an emergency.
- Carry your Ménière's Society membership card which explains the symptoms of your condition.
- Always pack a little more medication than you think you will need, especially those you only take during dizzy spells or spins, so that if you are delayed for any length of time you won't be stuck without your regular medication. Sometimes schedules get changed.
- If you are following a special diet (e.g. low salt or low caffeine), let friends/relatives know and/or ask in restaurants so they can suggest particular menu items or adapt if necessary. Keep your mind occupied and try not to worry about having an attack. Regularly take deep breaths and go through your own personal relaxation regime. Think of something pleasant or listen to relaxing music.
- On business trips, where possible, finish your business before you get too tired.

Walking

- If you are just starting to get out and about again stay within a comfortably safe distance of your home until you build up your confidence.
- Go for short, circular walks.
- Walk at your own rate and adjust your pace and step to maintain a comfortable balance.
- Wear comfortable low-heeled footwear and use a bag to carry items.



Ménière's Society The Rookery, Surrey Hills Business Park, Wotton, Dorking, Surrey, RH5 6QT

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- Some people find it helps to use a walking stick/pole. Folding sticks are available which can be put in a bag/pocket when not in use.

Travelling by Car

- If you are affected by motion sickness, you may wish to keep some of your medication and sealable plastic bags to hand.
- The flicker of strong sunlight through shaded trees, or the ripple of fencing or telegraph poles flashing past can trigger dizziness in some people.
- Some motoring organisations, under their recovery scheme, will recover you and your car if you are on your own and taken ill away from home. Terms and conditions will apply, but check with your motoring organisation to see if they offer this service.

Travelling by bus, train or underground

- Sit down if you can as keeping your balance when the vehicle starts/stops can be difficult.
- When travelling by bus/coach make sure you get a seat and try to avoid going upstairs on a double decker if you are unsteady.
- If motion bothers you, be careful getting on and off escalators; keep your eyes in front.

Air Travel

Most Ménière's sufferers report no difficulty at all with flying, indeed some report feeling better for the experience.

- When you book your flight or purchase your ticket, notify the airline of your Ménière's.
- Travel insurance for holidays abroad is a must, however because Ménière's is a pre-existing condition you may well have to pay a higher premium; shop around!
- If you're in doubt about a vertigo attack book an aisle seat; it's away from the view, which could be disorienting, and it's easier to get to the toilets.
- If noise and vibration are likely to trouble you try to book a seat away from the engines.
- If you are following a special diet (e.g. low salt), check with the airline about booking a meal to meet your dietary requirements.
- Once in flight keep your fluid intake up. The air in aircraft is very dry because it is conditioned and you will dehydrate to some degree. Avoid drinking alcohol in flight. It adds to the risk of dehydration and so increases the physical stress of flying.
- Some people will experience ear pain when flying. This is not Ménière's, the pain is caused by unequal pressure that develops between the air in the middle ear and the air outside the ear.

See *Ear pain during air travel, BMJ* <https://bestpractice.bmj.com/best-practice/pdf/patient-summaries/en-gb/532581.pdf> (Last accessed 03/08/17) and *How can I have a healthy and comfortable flight, NHS Choices* <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1953.aspx> (Last accessed 03/08/17) for more information.

Altitude Changes

Some people say air travel or travel up and down hills and mountains affects their symptoms. A feeling of fullness is often present, however, other symptoms may be affected too.



Travel by Sea

Some people find just thinking about the motion of a boat or ship almost brings on nausea, whereas others very much enjoy sailing.

- Consider the length of the trip and the likely sea conditions.
- Try a short trip first before you arrange a long cruise.
- Once at sea you may find it less disturbing to stay below deck with a book and avoid the visual effect of seeing the horizon appear to move.
- If you suffer from sea-sickness try to keep your fluid levels up by drinking water; vomiting significantly lowers your fluid levels.

Travel may be a challenge but don't write it off, even if you just arrange to take a friend and go out for the day. You don't have to go far to enjoy yourself. If you find you enjoy a short trip you can go further afield next time. Take one step at a time and enjoy your trip!

Motion Sickness

Motion sickness during travel occurs when the brain receives conflicting signals about movement. Motion sickness is often triggered by turbulence and vibration and made worse by warmth, anxiety and hunger or overeating. The main symptoms are stomach upset, nausea, vomiting, sweating, and dizziness. Motion sickness can be minimised before and during travel by: moderating intake of food, fluids, and alcohol; fixing eyes on a stationary object or on the horizon; lying down and keeping the eyes closed; choosing a seat where motion is felt least; refraining from reading; sitting by an open window or an air vent if possible; choosing a cabin in the middle of a ship close to water level may reduce motion sickness in some people. For severe sufferers of motion sickness, travel sickness medication may be helpful. You should speak with your GP, health professional or pharmacist regarding any medication.

Tinnitus and flying

If you have tinnitus, you may find that flying is the one time when you are usually completely free of tinnitus because of the noise made by the engines and airflow around the plane. If your Eustachian tubes are blocked, your tinnitus may seem temporarily louder. It should return to its usual level when your Eustachian tubes become unblocked. If you have tinnitus and hearing loss, you may find straining to hear makes your tinnitus louder when on a plane. If you normally wear hearing aids, you should keep them on during your flight as removing them may make your tinnitus louder and more noticeable. Being anxious about flying may make your tinnitus worse: basic relaxation exercises during the flight may help. In rare instances, engine noise can make your tinnitus worse. If you are worried about the noise of the engines, book ahead and try and get a seat near the front of the plane, away from the engines. Wearable sound generators can help to reduce any discomfort due to loud sounds.

Travelling with hearing aids

- Check/service hearing aids before leaving to ensure they are in good working order.



- Take a supply of batteries to last for the duration of your travel. If helpful, find out where your nearest service centre will be at your destination and find out where you can obtain batteries should you run out whilst away from home.
- Take a wax cleaner, air puffer or other cleaning tool with you and use regularly.
- Obtain advice before leaving regarding caring for your aid and batteries, if travelling to destinations where the climate is likely to be extreme (hot, cold, humid or dry).
- Consider insuring your aids against theft, loss or damage while travelling.
- Ascertain whether assistive listening devices are available for your use (e.g. hearing loops).
- Some hotel registration cards allow guests to identify if they have any special needs. This might include needing assistance in case of an evacuation, such as requiring notification of a fire alarm if the building does not have visual fire alarms. Volunteer this information, if needed, when checking in so that your needs are considered.

Grommets and flying

Flying is less likely to cause discomfort in a child or adult with a grommet in their ear. The grommet allows air in and out of the ear and reduces the stress on the eardrum that is caused by changes in air pressure in the plane. Check with your GP/health professional for advice and if you have any concerns.

Flying after ear surgery

Check with your ENT consultant when it would be safe for you to fly after any kind of ear surgery.

Cochlear implants

You should check with your health professional for advice related to your own cochlear implant.

Members' Experiences

“ I have always loved travelling and refuse to give this up otherwise I would be a complete misery. I have travelled to France by plane with no problems. I undertook a 21-day cruise from Southampton to America and Canada. I had visions of getting to New York and having to fly home because I could not handle the sea. I used the swimming pool and gym daily and had no attacks at all. The cruise ships all have doctors on board so you know there is help available if needed. There is no problem ordering low salt meals as they are used to special diets. We booked a cabin low down and mid-ship which is important if the sea is rough. I would certainly go on a cruise again; the only barrier is affording it!

“ Until recently my only experience of sea travel was cross-channel ferries and short pleasure trips, and I usually suffered seasickness on anything but a calm sea. Since diagnosed with Ménière's, I take Serc daily and appear to be able to cope much better with sea travel; albeit on a well-stabilised cruise ship. The only problem I had on the first cruise to the Norwegian Fjords, was when travelling at full speed across the rather rough North Sea, I did feel somewhat ill for a couple of hours. While the symptoms were similar to vertigo, I



think it was just seasickness. However, on the way back across the North Sea from a Baltic cruise a quite severe attack of vertigo was triggered by a sudden force 11 gust; although I had been fine through the night in Force 5-8. I suffered from extreme dizziness, nausea and some sickness for most of the day and could hardly stand, let alone walk. There were many people who were ill while the sea was rough, but I am pretty sure that my attack was not just travel-sickness. While the attack was very unpleasant at the time, and somewhat debilitating for a while afterwards, it did not spoil my enjoyment of the cruise and I hope to go on more in the future.

“ On a recent holiday we were cruising off the coast of New Zealand (south island), waiting to enter Fjordland, when we quickly encountered a Force 12/13 hurricane with winds of 100 mph and 18ft waves. Thank heavens for Ménière’s; I never thought I would hear myself say! It was early morning and fortunately we were not particularly hungry, so I said to my wife the best place was to stay in bed, pull the curtains and go with the flow: just like a normal day! We eventually staggered up to the restaurant about 1pm where the cleaning up was happening in earnest, dryers everywhere and lots of green faces. Some 20 years of Ménière’s has seen me struggle with most things but because of my continuing imbalance I was able to take it in my stride. (Tip: don’t look at the horizon.)

“ Although it might seem strange, I have to say that Ménière’s actually made me get on with my life. My doctor warned that the attacks would get worse as the disease progressed and I would probably go completely deaf in my left ear and it may affect the other ear. I started a lip reading course immediately and as I had always wanted to travel, I started travelling the world, blocking out my fear. My first trip was to New Zealand and Australia via Hong Kong. I admit that I was terrified because I had a very severe Ménière’s attack lasting three weeks before I went and as I was doing the first leg of the journey on my own, and having a three-day trip to the Barrier Reef on my own at the end of the holiday, I did question my sanity a few times. However, with the help of mentholated sweets to clear my airways on the ascent and descent of flights (a brilliant tip), I coped really well. I also put a note in my passport to warn people in case I had an attack while I was on my own, that I was not drunk or on drugs! The next year I did another trip to Australia, to see the rest of the country, flying out on my own all the way that time. I have also done trips to Thailand, South America (Ecuador and Peru including Machu Picchu coping well with altitude), Galapagos Islands on a yacht and Canada. I have always believed in the quotation “feel the fear and do it anyway!” For me, the Bowen Technique has been the answer to my prayers! I have always felt that if you have the tools to deal with things, and I am still learning more tools, then you can cope with whatever life throws at you!

Travel Insurance Companies

The Ménière’s Society cannot recommend a particular company or offer advice on their products. The companies listed are provided for information and have been collated from members and other sources. Insurers can refuse to cover medical expenses abroad if the treatment is for a pre-



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existing medical condition; including any ongoing medical condition or a condition you've had in the past; even if you have made a full recovery. If you're not asked about your medical history, volunteer the information when you buy the policy, however irrelevant it may seem. Some insurers will cover you but may charge an extra premium.

• AllClear Travel	allcleartravel.co.uk	01708 339295
• Able2Travel	able2travel.com	01892 839 501
• Flexicover Direct	flexicover.co.uk	0800 093 9495
• Free Spirit Travel Insurance	freespirittravelinsurance.com	0800 170 7704
• Freedom Travel Insurance	freedominsure.co.uk	01223 446914
• Orbis Insurance Services	orbisinsurance.co.uk	01424 215315
• Saga	saga.co.uk/insurance	0800 015 8055
• World First Travel Insurance	world-first.co.uk	0345 90 80 161

For UK advice on travelling overseas visit the Foreign & Commonwealth Office at www.gov.uk.

Contact the Ménière's Society for further information:

01306 876883 info@menieres.org.uk menieres.org.uk

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Disclaimer: The Ménière's Society recommends that you always consult your GP, consultant or therapist for professional guidance before you begin, change, temporarily suspend or discontinue any treatment, medication, exercise or diet. The Society cannot advise on individual cases nor accept any liability resulting from the use of any treatments referred to in this information sheet. Information correct at time of publication.

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for dizziness and balance disorders



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