Balance & Dizziness

Q. What is Ménière's disease?

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A. Ménière's's disease is an inner ear disease, first described by Dr. Prosper Ménière in 1861. It is characterized by a pattern of repeated disabling attacks of spinning vertigo lasting hours and accompanied by noise, pressure and muffled hearing in the affected ear. The attacks may also include nausea, vomiting, sweating and/or unsteadiness. Over time, both hearing and balance function in the affected ear gradually weaken.

More recently, researchers have discovered that other disorders can almost exactly mimic Ménière's. If Ménière's is suspected, it is important to consult with an ear specialist such as an otologist or neurotologist to determine the exact diagnosis and best course of treatment.

Most patients with Ménière's disease can control their symptoms very well with conservative treatments such as diuretic medication and a reduced sodium diet. When an attack occurs, as-needed medication can be used to blunt the symptoms. More aggressive treatments are available should these conservative measures fail. Aggressive treatments include injections of medication into the affected ear, and several ear surgery options.

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