

Mal de Debarquement

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Fact Sheet

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Mal de Debarquement Syndrome (MDDS) *What is MDDS?*

Individuals with MDDS complain of dizziness and imbalance after returning from being on a prolonged voyage, such as after taking a cruise (also can occur with long plane or car rides).

Symptoms:

- Dizzy and off balance once back “on land”
- “Rocking” or “swaying” sensation
- May last weeks to months (years in rare cases)

What are possible causes of MDDS?

- Vestibular (balance) system in inner ear does not adjust once back on land
- Form of migraine syndrome
- Heredity / Hormonal cause (occurs more often in women than men)
- Inability to disregard our body’s reactions that were developed to prevent falling

How do I know that I have MDDS?

A person is diagnosed with MDDS by ruling out other causes of dizziness and unsteadiness. The onset of dizziness is usually associated with recent pro- longed travel. It differs from motion sickness because people with MDDS feel better in a moving car, plane or boat. Some people with MDDS say that their symptoms feel better when they board a ship again

How can physical therapy help my symptoms due to MDDS?

Physical Therapy can help with MDDS in some patients. The imbalance and gait instability can be treated with PT. The rocking/swaying

symptoms can be treated with sensory integration (feeling the ground) and habituation exercises. Habituation exercises require doing movements that increase the symptoms slightly. Sensory integration teaches the body increase the use of its internal balance systems (vision, touch/pressure, and vestibular). Walking with feet apart and feeling the heel hit the ground first can help you feel more stable. Treatments aimed at teaching the person to “ignore” their body’s abnormal reaction to movement may also help recovery

Is there medication to help treat for MDDS?

There are no standard medications that will decrease your symptoms and imbalance due to MDDS. Certain antidepressants, seizure or anxiety medications have been helpful as part of the treatment. Very small amounts of anxiety medicines taken before getting on and during a cruise or a flight may prevent MDDS. Other medications like meclizine & scopolamine, which are used to treat other forms of dizziness, generally do not help in reducing the rocking sensation in patients with MDDS.

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