

## MENIERE'S DISEASE

Meniere's disease is a mysterious, sometimes frightening disease which plagues millions of people. The cause of Meniere's is unknown.

There is a liquid which naturally flows through the chambers and canals of the inner ears, and bathes the nerve endings designated for balance. This fluid moves as the head and body moves. These nerve endings form the vestibular nerve which then sends a message from these inner ear fluid chambers to the brain, informing it of the latest position of the body. The eyes, muscles and joints also send additional positional messages to the brain. The brain interprets these messages, and then sends out instructions to the body so that it can adjust and balance itself.

If the volume of liquid in the chambers and canals increases, the fluid pressure also increases, sending an incorrect message to the brain. The fluid normally drains into the endolymphatic sac located in the mastoid bone. In Meniere's disease, increased fluid pressure causes the *symptoms* of this disease, which are: sometimes violent vertigo (spinning or movement sensation), nausea, vomiting, hearing loss, tinnitus (ear ringing), ear stuffiness or ear fullness.

*Meclizine* can alleviate and shorten the effects of the acute episode, but this should be used sparingly given side effects of sedation. There are other medications (i.e., *ondansetron*, *phenergan*) which can help control nausea and vomiting. Diuretics are used to reduce the inner ear fluid and often prescribed to prevent or reduce the episodes. Antihistamines are sometimes use as there might be an allergy component to this. To reduce the inner ear fluid, it is important to **decrease salt in the diet**; sodium intake should not exceed 2,000mg per day. Many patients find it helpful to record daily sodium intake in a diary, since one can easily surpass 2,000mg. Also eliminate or reduce caffeine and alcohol intake, and do not smoke. Stress relief can also help. When medication fails to control the disease, surgery might be indicated. Candidates for surgery would be referred to an otology subspecialist.