

Vestibular Migraine

A vestibular migraine is a type of migraine that has episodes of moderate or severe dizziness (e.g., lightheadedness, wooziness, etc.) and/or vertigo (e.g., spinning, rocking, etc.) that can occur before, during, or even after a headache. Dizziness and vertigo symptoms due to a vestibular migraine typically last from five minutes to 72 hours, however, the duration can range from seconds to minutes to hours to days.

For a vestibular migraine diagnosis**, there must be a current or previous history of migraine and *at least half* of the dizziness or vertigo episodes must occur with *one or more* of the following:

- Headache with at least 2 of these qualities: one sided, pulsating, moderate or severe pain, and/or aggravated by physical activity (e.g., bending over)
- Light and sound sensitive
- Visual aura (temporary distortion, like zigzag lines, bright sparkling lights or blind spot)

Vestibular migraine can be difficult for patients and clinicians to recognize because headache may not occur at all. However, the presence of light and sound sensitivity or nausea and/or vomiting or a visual aura is helpful when making the diagnosis. Additionally, patients with vestibular migraine can have poor tolerance to position changes (e.g., bending over, looking up, rolling in bed), self-motion (e.g., turning head), visual-motion (e.g., cars passing at an intersection), or busy environments (e.g., grocery stores) and/or unsteadiness. It is similarly not unusual for patients with vestibular migraine to have ear pressure or fullness or ear ringing.

If you are having vestibular migraine-like symptoms, make an appointment with a neurologist *who specializes in headaches*. Bring to the appointment a track record of the days you recently had dizziness, vertigo &/or headache and any medications you took. Also, when asked to describe your symptoms, concisely explain the quality (e.g. spinning, rocking, lightheaded, pulsating pain, etc.), duration, intensity, other associated symptoms, and any possible triggers. Once provided a diagnosis, you can discuss treatment options (e.g., medication, complementary, behavioral).

Seeking care from a physical or occupational therapist that *specializes in vestibular rehabilitation* is recommended to help manage the dizziness and/or vertigo and address any unsteadiness. Also, if you suspect that the headache you experience is aggravated by neck problems, have a physical therapist assess and treat your neck.

Essential Strategy for treating Vestibular Migraine: When treating vestibular migraine, it is essential to reduce and prevent migraine attacks. It has been found that there are lifestyle behaviors that help reduce and prevent migraine. These lifestyle behaviors have been organized into an acronym to make up the word **SEEDS*** as an easy way to remember them. See the next page to learn about **SEEDS** so that you can make sure you incorporate them into your life.

For a short period of time, keeping a *daily journal* of your sleep habits, water intake, exercise schedule, and any stressors can be helpful with identifying any lifestyle behaviors that may need to be changed. You can also note if certain foods or beverages are triggers for you. It is recommended that you discuss your current lifestyle with your health care provider, so that together, you can make a plan to successfully integrate the behaviors recommended to raise your migraine threshold and avoid the behaviors that are considered migraine triggers.

****Probable Vestibular Migraine requires vestibular symptoms with either current or previous history of migraine OR one or more of the migraine features.**

*The mnemonic SEEDS was coined by Lawrence Newman MD, Professor of Neurology at NYU Langone Medical Center, NY.

SEEDS*

	RECOMMEND	AVOID
Sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular sleep/wake time • Room cool and dark • Quiet activities before bed • Low noise/white noise, if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading, TV, & phone while in bed • Caffeine, Alcohol & Nicotine few hours before bed • Napping longer than 20 minutes
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate intensity aerobic that builds up slowly over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting a new exercise program without consulting with a trained health care provider (e.g., Physician or physical therapist) • Exercising intensely if you have not been exercising regularly
Eat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh meats, poultry, fish • Gluten-free grains • Seeds and seed butters • Most vegetables • Most fruits, including sulfite-free dried fruits • Spices & most condiments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dairy • Preserved/cured/processed meats *wheat • Nuts and nut butters • Corn, onion, peas, broad beans, olives, mushrooms • Figs, dates, avocados, raisins, raspberries, red plums, passion fruit, papaya, pineapple, apples, peaches, bananas, kiwi, citrus, possibly tomatoes • artificial sweeteners • Chocolate/cocoa, MSG, soy, & fermented, pickled, marinated foods <p>**See below for managing how to avoid foods</p>
Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay hydrated (Recommend drinking eight 8-oz glasses of water/day) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol • Caffeine • Milk (cow) • Possibly citrus juices
Stress Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing or progressive muscle relaxation techniques • Taking breaks: listen to calming music, talk to friends/family, enjoy your hobby, soak in a warm tub, spend time in nature • Yoga or Tai Chi • Mindfulness Meditation[†] • Seek counseling[‡] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to yourself harshly and unkindly • Taking on too much • Unrealistic goals

**It is recommended that you avoid these foods when you don't have the headache &/or dizziness/vertigo under control. Once you do have the symptoms under control, you can slowly add foods back into your diet, one at a time, to see whether they are a trigger for you. For most, only a few foods trigger headache. *NOTE: When you make long term dietary adjustments, it is advised that you consult with a registered dietician to make sure that you are consuming a nutritionally balanced diet. Also, if you are on a specialized diet or fluid restriction, consult with your physician before making changes.*

† We all know that managing stress is essential to our health, however if it is challenging for you to help yourself, an option would be to take a mindfulness meditation course from a qualified instructor and make this practice a regular part of your life.

‡ If stress is overwhelming, consider seeking assistance from a psychologist that specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy.

*The mnemonic SEEDS was coined by Lawrence Newman MD, Professor of Neurology at NYU Langone Medical Center, NY.

Information in this handout was created in 2022 by Lisa Farrell, PT, PhD, AT,C at lisa@symmetryalliance.com and Dana B. Thomas, MS, PT at dthomas@wakemed.org