Mal de Debarquement syndrome

Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn about:

- What Mal de Debarquement syndrome is
- Symptoms
- How your doctor will diagnose it
- Treatment options
What is Mal de Debarquement syndrome?
Mal de Debarquement syndrome is a rare problem with balance. It usually starts after you get off a boat from an ocean cruise, or other boat trip. Some people have this problem after getting off a train or airplane.

The most common symptoms are feeling like you are always:
- moving
- rocking
- swaying
- bobbing

There can be many other symptoms too.

How long does it last?
It can last for weeks, months, or years after the trip.

What causes it?
The parts of your body in charge of balance is your vestibular system. This system includes parts of your inner ear and brain. When you travel by boat, plane or train, this system changes to help your body get used to the motion. When you are back on stable land, it usually changes back to normal.

With Mal de Debarquement syndrome, your vestibular system does not go back to normal when you get back on stable ground.
What are the symptoms?

People with this syndrome may have many symptoms.

Here are some you may have:

**Balance problems**
- feeling like you are rocking, bobbing or swaying
- problems standing and walking

**Nausea**
- problems thinking clearly
- problems concentrating
- feeling confused or disoriented
- problems coping with busy patterns
- memory loss

**Vision problems**
- bouncing vision
- feeling sensitive to flashing lights

**Ear problems**
- pain in your ears
- feeling full in your ears
- ringing in your ears
- feeling sensitive to loud or sudden noises

**Other problems:**
- headaches
- fatigue
- anxiety
- depression
- heaviness (feeling that your head, body and feet are being pulled to the ground)
Diagnosis

How do I know if I have it?

Your doctor needs to:

1. ask you about your medical history
2. do a physical exam
3. do some tests

The tests will show if you have another disorder with similar symptoms. Most people with Mal de Débarquement seem normal. They will also have normal test results.

To say you have this syndrome, your doctor has to see:

- that you took a trip on a ship, or had an experience with new movement
- the symptoms should started right after you got off the boat, or the motion stopped (not a few weeks later)

People who have this disorder feel better when they are in motion. This includes driving or riding in a car, airplane, train or other motion activity. However, the symptoms come back as soon as the motion stops.

This information will help your doctor decide if you have Mal de Débarquement syndrome.
Can it be treated?
Unfortunately, there is no cure for Mal de Debarquement syndrome. There is one kind of treatment that has helped some patients. This uses:

- vestibular rehabilitation therapy
- exercise programs that you do at home

There are some other treatments, but they do not work for most people.

What about medicine?
Medicine for motion sickness does not work for people with this syndrome.

What else might help?
Here are some tips that may help you. They will not make the symptoms go away, but they may help you to cope.

- **Reduce your stress.** This is very important.
- Get enough sleep.
- Get help from family and friends. Give them information about Mal de Debarquement and ask them for support.
- Exercise. This helps to reduce stress and calm your nervous system. It will also improve your sense of balance.

Many people find this syndrome very difficult and frustrating. Try to adapt by making changes that work for you. If you try to think positively, it can help you to manage your condition.
Who can I contact for more information?

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