



Managing Ménière's Disease

Hopeful or Hopeless?

By

Mark McGee

Ménière's Disease

Ménière's Disease is rare, progressive, and incurable. Does that sound “hopeful” or “hopeless”?

I have had Ménière's for many years. It is part of the health history of many families and can apparently be passed along from one generation to another genetically. Many of my relatives have it now or had it prior to their deaths. However, the exact reason for the disease is still unknown even though it was “discovered” by French doctor Prosper Ménière more than 160 years ago.

In 1861, Prosper Ménière presented a paper before the French Academy of Medicine in which he described a series of patients with episodic vertigo and hearing loss. He also mentioned the postmortem examination of a young girl who experienced vertigo after a hemorrhage into the inner ear. Prior to that time, vertigo was thought to be a cerebral symptom similar to epileptic seizures. Ménière pointed out that vertigo frequently had a benign course and that common

treatments, such as bleeding, often did more harm than good. He was not attempting to define a disease or syndrome but rather to emphasize that vertigo could originate from damage to the inner ear. Confusion regarding the clinical and pathologic features of Ménière disease persisted well into the 20th century.

[NIH National Library of Medicine](#)

Since Dr. Ménière made his “discoveries” concerning episodic vertigo and hearing loss more than 160 years ago, it is safe to say that the illness had been in existence long before that time.

You can click on the two articles below to learn more about ancient studies concerning vestibular disturbances.

[Dizziness and vertigo syndromes viewed with a historical eye](#)

Seasickness, fear of heights, and adverse effects of alcohol were the major areas where descriptions of vertigo and dizziness were found in Roman, Greek, and Chinese texts from about 730 BC–600 AD. A few

detailed accounts were suggestive of specific vestibular disorders such as Menière's attacks (*Huangdi Neijing, the Yellow Thearch's Classic of Internal Medicine*) or vestibular migraine (Aretaeus of Cappadocia). Further, the etymological and metaphorical meanings of the terms and their symptoms provide fascinating historical insights, e.g.

Archigenes and the syndrome of vertigo, tinnitus, hearing loss, and headache

Although it is difficult to put modern disease names to an old symptomatic description, Siegel maintains that Archigenes' description of vertigo adequately represents Ménière disease. He further points out that Galen's attribution of the cause of ailment to a disturbance of the blood flow in the arteries of the ear and skull base testifies to his correct localization of this syndrome. A careful revisiting the text of Galen reveals that Archigenes did actually mention two clinical forms of the paroxysmal vertigo of cephalic origin: one being preceded by tinnitus and headache and the other by

an olfactory disturbance and other sensory changes (possibly corresponding to a vestibular migraine). Rhazes has a slightly different interpretation of Archigenes where he surmises, after citing Archigenes, if the brain or head is the origin of vertigo, the patient “invariably suffers from heaviness in the ears and visual blurring,” and “experiences a severe pain [headache] and tinnitus beforehand; his senses of audition and olfaction are impaired and sometimes a weakness in vision manifests alongside” (Bateni, 2019). Rhazes is more explicit in his account of hearing loss in the cepalic vertigo of Archigenes.

Sharing Experiences

In future articles I will share some of my own experiences dealing with this disease, along with the experiences of other people who suffer from Ménière's — some who are newly diagnosed, and others who have had the illness for decades. I will also also share insights from people in the medical community who are trying to better understand Ménière's and find ways to help people suffering from it.

My purpose is to share information that may be helpful to the Ménière's community. It is an extremely small community — estimated to be only about 0.2 percent of the U.S. population. The worldwide number is estimated to be less than that — 0.012 percent of the population. Many people have never heard of Ménière's and don't understand what's happening when a friend or family member has a “vertigo” attack caused by Ménière's. The “spinning” sensation, along with the accompanying nausea and loss of physical control and strength, are almost too much to bear at times. However, having people around you who understand what you're going

through is a big help to someone suffering from Ménière's. That's part of the "hopeful" side of Ménière's.

"... rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer." Romans 12:12

Here's to hope!