

Mal de Debarquement (MdDS)

What is Mal de Debarquement Syndrome?

Mal de debarquement means sickness of disembarkment which refers to an illusion of movement felt as an after effect of travel. Sea travel is the most common starting point for Mal de Debarquement Syndrome (MdDS). Symptoms can last for weeks, months or even years.

What are the symptoms of Mal de Debarquement?

- Sensation of rocking, bobbing or swaying
- Unsteadiness leading to anxiety and loss of self-confidence.
- High visual sensitivity

The symptoms often increase when the person is trying to remain motionless for example attempting to fall asleep or standing still. Mal de debarquement does not include other symptoms such as spinning, vomiting, ear pressure, tinnitus or hearing loss which are associated with vestibular disorders.

What causes of Mal de Debarquement?

It has been suggested that the syndrome is not in the inner ear but occurs somewhere within the balance areas of the brain. It is thought that the brain adapts to a particular motion, for example, of a ship, however when the movement stops the brain is unable to readapt to its former state. Another theory is that mal de debarquement is a migraine variant.

How to diagnose Mal de Debarquement?

Obtaining a diagnosis is quite hard in MdDS patients around the world due to the lack of clear data and the lack of awareness of the condition. However, neurologists and ENT specialists are the most common healthcare professionals diagnosing the condition. To rule out any other potential causes of these symptoms, objective diagnostic procedures such as vestibular testing, radiological examinations and magnetic resonance imaging may be performed. If these test results are normal, then a diagnosis is made through history of symptoms and physical examination. For a clear diagnosis there must be a history of a ship voyage, plane journey or another new movement, that when returned to a normal environment the symptoms would have started.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for Mal de Debarquement syndrome so far. The standard drugs given for sickness seem to be ineffective. Some treatments that have been suggested include vestibular rehabilitation therapy. There are some helpful tips for coping and managing the symptoms including reducing stress and getting a good night's sleep. Additionally, when driving it may help if you move your head while stopped at traffic lights and look ahead for a few minutes before getting out of the car. After the end of an activity with constant movement, take a walk and focus on the horizon.

Useful links?

<https://www.menieres.org.uk/information-and-support/symptoms-and-conditions/mal-de-debarquement>
<https://vestibular.org/article/diagnosis-treatment/types-of-vestibular-disorders/mal-de-debarquement/>

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact The Balance Team Secretary: 0121 424 3154

Accessibility

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