

Sea Sickness (Mal de Mer) – prevention and management

Sea sickness can be annoying and even debilitating, spoiling a fun of sailing or sea cruising. Fortunately, it is very well treatable and preventable condition, as soon as you understand it's causes and symptoms.

In this newsletter, we provide a brief review of sea sickness remedies, and will continue with more details in following chapters.

If you have motion sickness on a boat, try these tips:

- Ask for a cabin on the upper deck or toward the front of the ship.
- When on deck, keep your eyes fixed on the horizon or land.

Treatment

You can use medication to control your symptoms, but people who travel often may want to learn to control, and prevent, symptoms. Mind-body practices, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and biofeedback, may help. Other alternatives include:

- Homeopathy
- Acupuncture
- Dietary supplements
- Changes to your diet
- Vestibular rehabilitation therapy

Medications

Medications for motion sickness may cause drowsiness. Pilots, ship crew members, or anyone operating heavy equipment or driving a car should not take them. These medications may help:

- **Scopolamine (Transderm-Scop):** most commonly prescribed medication for motion sickness. You have to take it before symptoms start. It comes in patch form to put behind your ear 6 to 8 hours before travel. The effects last up to 3 days. Side effects may include dry mouth, drowsiness, blurred vision, and disorientation.
- **Promethazine (Phenergan): (Oral/ Rectal/Injections)** take 2 hours before travel. The effects last 6 to 8 hours. Side effects include drowsiness and dry mouth.
- **Cyclizine (Marezine):** works best when taken at least 30 minutes before travel. It is not recommended for children younger than 6, and side effects are similar to scopolamine.
- **Diphenhydramin/Dimenhydrinate (Benadryl/Dramamine):** take every 4 to 8 hours. Side effects are similar to scopolamine.
- **Meclizine (Bonine/Antivert/Dramamine II):** works best when taken 1 hour before travel. It is not recommended for children under 12. Side effects include drowsiness and dry mouth.
- **Benzodiazepines (Xanax/Valium)** best taken at bed time

Nutrition and Dietary Supplements

A comprehensive treatment plan to treat motion sickness may include a range of complementary and alternative therapies. Ask your team of health care providers about the best ways to incorporate these therapies into your overall treatment plan. Always tell your provider about the herbs and supplements you are using or considering using.

Following these nutritional tips may help reduce symptoms:

- Avoid spicy, greasy, or fatty meals
- DO NOT overeat
- Drink plenty of water
- Dry crackers and carbonated sodas (such as ginger ale) help some people avoid nausea.
- People who tend to have motion sickness may want to eat small, frequent meals.

Herbs

Herbs may strengthen and tone the body's systems. As with any therapy, you should work with your provider before starting any treatment. You may use herbs as dried extracts (capsules, powders, teas), glycerites (glycerine extracts), or tinctures (alcohol extracts). Unless otherwise indicated, make teas with 1 tsp. herb per cup of hot water. Steep covered 5 to 10 minutes for leaf or flowers, and 10 to 20 minutes for roots. Drink 2 to 4 cups per day. You may use tinctures alone or in combination as noted.

- **Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*):** 250 mg, 3 times daily as needed, for symptoms of nausea. Ginger is a traditional remedy for nausea, and some studies show it may help with motion sickness. Other studies have found it does not work, however. Ginger may increase the risk of bleeding, especially if you also take blood-thinners such warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin. If you have a heart condition, talk to your doctor before taking ginger.
- **Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*):** 1 enteric-coated tablet, 2 to 3 times daily as needed. You may also make a tea from the leaf. Peppermint can interact with some medications. Ask your doctor before taking it.
- **Black horehound (*Ballotta nigra*):** 1 to 2 ml as a tincture or 1 to 2 tsp. of leaves steeped as a tea, taken 3 times per day. This is a traditional remedy for motion sickness, but no scientific studies have been done to see if it works. Black horehound can interact with Parkinson medications, and may be harmful to some people with Parkinson or Schizophrenia.

Acupuncture

Some studies suggest that acupressure may help reduce symptoms of motion sickness in the same way as acupuncture, although the findings are inconclusive. An acupressure practitioner works with the same points used in acupuncture, but uses finger pressure rather than needles. Acupressure bands are available commercially to help prevent motion sickness. Studies suggest these bands may help delay the onset of symptoms.

Traditionally, the acupuncture point known as Pericardium 6 is said to help relieve nausea. It is on the inside of the wrist, about the length of 2 fingernails up the arm from the center of the wrist crease. Many travel stores sell wrist bands with built-in buttons that apply acupressure to this point.



Homeopathy

Few studies have examined the effectiveness of specific homeopathic remedies. A professional homeopath, however, may recommend one or more of the following treatments for motion sickness based on their knowledge and clinical experience. Before prescribing a remedy, homeopaths take into account a person's constitutional type, includes your physical, emotional, and intellectual makeup. An experienced homeopath assesses all of these factors when determining the most appropriate remedy for a particular individual.

- *Borax*: for nausea caused by downward motions, such as landing in an airplane
- *Cocculus*: the primary treatment for motion sickness, particularly if nausea and vertigo or other type of dizziness are present
- *Nux vomica*: for motion sickness accompanied by headache, nausea, and ringing in the ears
- *Petroleum*: for dizziness and nausea that occur when riding in a car or boat
- *Sepia*: for motion sickness brought on by reading while in a moving vehicle
- *Tabacum*: for motion sickness with severe nausea and vomiting

There are "combination" remedies that include these remedies together. Although a classically trained homeopath may frown upon such combinations, some find them easier and effective for home use.

Mind-Body Medicine

Biofeedback Training and Relaxation

In a study of 55 pilots who had to stop flying due to motion sickness, 76% of them got over their motion sickness and were able to return to work after a biofeedback training and relaxation program. The pilots sat in a tilting, rotating chair to bring on motion sickness, while biofeedback instruments recorded skin temperature and changes in muscle tension. The pilots used relaxation techniques, such as deep muscle relaxation and mental imagery, while in the chair. Over time, the pilots got used to the rotating chair and no longer felt sick as they learned to relax.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy is used to reduce the anxiety, some people simply develop symptoms just by thinking about movement or motion sickness. In a study of 50 pilots who occasionally had motion sickness, 86% of them got better after cognitive behavioral therapy. During this therapy, people are slowly exposed to a situation that causes motion sickness until they have some symptoms, but not until the symptoms become overwhelming. As they get used to the movement, they build confidence and their anxiety goes down.

Breathing Techniques

In a study of 46 people with motion sickness, those who took slow, deep breaths had fewer symptoms than those who breathed normally or counted their breaths. Rapid and shallow breathing often makes symptoms of motion sickness worse. While it makes sense that slow, deeper breathing would help lower anxiety, more studies are needed to see whether breathing techniques really help reduce other symptoms.

Vestibular Rehabilitation,

especially the most advanced computer-based visual-vestibular re-integration program, provides the most individualized approach to sea sickness management

See you on board!

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