

Betahistine for Ménière's disease or syndrome (Review)

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[Intervention Review]

Betahistine for Ménière's disease or syndrome

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ABSTRACT

Background

Ménière's disease is characterised by attacks of hearing loss, tinnitus and disabling vertigo. Betahistine (Serc®, Betaserc®) is used by many people to reduce the frequency and severity of these attacks but there is conflicting evidence relating to its effects.

Objectives

The objective of this review was to assess the effects of betahistine in people with Ménière's disease.

Search strategy

For the update of this review in 2007 we searched the Cochrane Ear, Nose and Throat Disorders Group Trials Register, the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL, *The Cochrane Library*, Issue 2 2007), MEDLINE (1950 to June 2007), EMBASE (1974 to June 2007), CINAHL (1982 to June 2007), AMED (Allied and Complementary Medicine), *mRCT* (*meta*Register of Clinical Trials), NRR (National Research Register), LILACS, ZETOC, Cambridge Scientific Abstracts and ISI Web of Science. The date of the last search was June 2007. We checked reference lists of articles and contacted pharmaceutical companies for further studies.

Selection criteria

Randomised controlled studies of betahistine versus placebo in Ménière's disease.

Data collection and analysis

Two authors independently assessed trial quality and extracted data. Study authors were contacted for further information.

Main results

Seven trials involving 243 patients were included. No trial met the highest quality standard set by the review because of inadequate diagnostic criteria or methods, and none assessed the effect of betahistine on vertigo adequately. Most trials suggested a reduction of vertigo with betahistine and some suggested a reduction in tinnitus but all these effects may have been caused by bias in the methods. One trial with good methods showed no effect of betahistine on tinnitus compared with placebo in 35 patients. None of the trials showed any effect of betahistine on hearing loss. No serious adverse effects were found with betahistine.

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Authors' conclusions

There is insufficient evidence to say whether betahistine has any effect on Ménière's disease.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Not enough evidence about the effects of betahistine on Ménière's disease or syndrome

Ménière's disease is a disorder of the inner ear which results in a spinning form of dizziness (vertigo), hearing loss and ringing in the ear (tinnitus), and can be disabling. It has no known cause. When it is secondary to a known inner ear disorder, it is called Ménière's syndrome. Both can be difficult to diagnose. The drug betahistine hydrochloride (Serc®, Betaserc®) has been used to reduce the frequency and severity of the attacks. While the drug is very acceptable to those who use it, the review of trials did not find enough evidence to show whether it is helpful. Further research is needed.