

Introduction

Motion sickness is a common problem in people who travel. It can cause nausea and vomiting. It can also cause dizziness and cold sweats.

Most people will feel motion sickness at least once in their lives. It can affect you if you travel by car, train or airplane. It often affects people traveling by boat.

This reference summary covers the symptoms and causes of motion sickness. It also talks about the treatment and prevention of motion sickness.

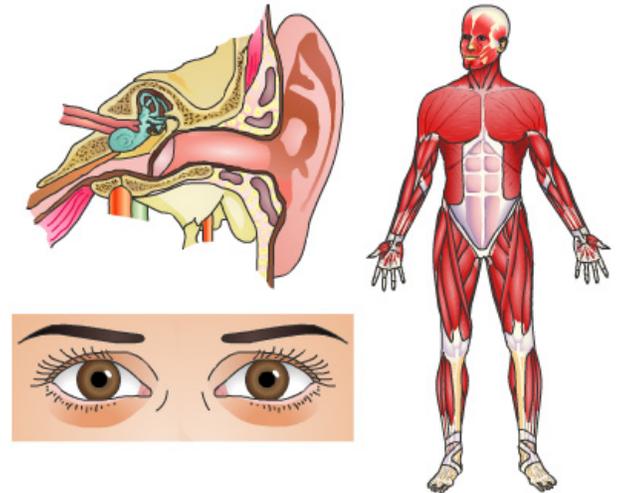


Movement and the Body

This section talks about how your body senses and interprets movement. It will help you understand motion sickness. Many parts of the body help with movement, including:

- The inner ears.
- Eyes.
- Skin.
- Muscles and joints.

There is liquid inside both of your ears. The liquid helps you sense movement. Small canals in the inner ear are filled with this liquid. When you move in any direction, the liquid within the inner ears shifts. Your brain interprets the shifts. This is how you know if you are moving and in which direction.



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Your eyes help your body understand movement. They let you see if you are moving. They also help you see in which direction you are moving. The surface of your skin also helps you feel movement. Tiny receptors are located on the skin's surface. They tell your brain which parts of your body touch the ground.

You also have receptors inside your body. They are found on your skin, muscles and joints. These receptors tell your brain whether you are moving your muscles. They also send messages to the brain about the position of your body.

Motion sickness happens when the body parts that sense movement don't agree. Different parts of the body send messages to the brain. One part of the body says it is moving. Another part says it is not moving. The brain becomes confused.

For example, riding on a rollercoaster can cause motion sickness. The inner ear may tell the brain that the body is moving forward, up and down or side to side. But the skin tells the brain that the body is sitting still.

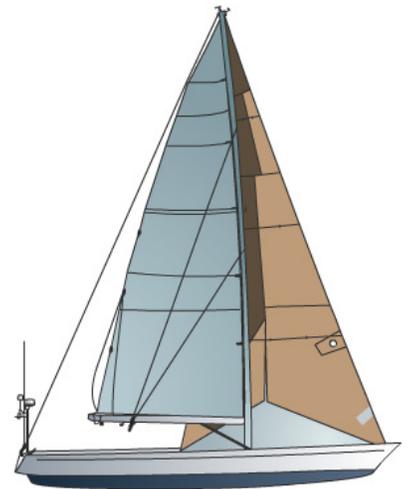


Causes

In many ways motion sickness is caused by movement. But it is also caused by your brain and the parts of your body that sense movement. Your brain uses information from many parts of the body to form a full picture of what you are doing. Motion sickness happens when a piece of the picture is missing or confusing. It happens most often during travel.

For example, think about sailing. Your eyes and inner ears read the motion differently. Your eyes see the up-and-down movement of the waves. The liquid in your inner ear senses side-to-side movement.

Some people get sick when they read during a car ride. This happens when the inner ears and skin receptors tell the brain that the body is moving forward. However, the eyes are looking at a book that isn't moving. The muscles also report that you're sitting still.



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Symptoms

The most common symptom of motion sickness is nausea, or feeling sick to your stomach. This can lead to vomiting.

Other common symptoms of motion sickness include:

- Abdominal pain.
- Dizziness, also called vertigo.
- Feeling very tired.

Motion sickness can also cause a general feeling of discomfort. Some people may just not feel well. As motion sickness sets in, your face may become pale. You may break into a cold sweat.

In severe cases, some people hyperventilate. This means they have very fast, deep breathing. It can also lead to faintness, or the feeling that you are about to pass out.



Risk Factors

Most people will get motion sickness at some time during their lives. But some groups are at a higher risk for motion sickness. This does not mean that everyone with a risk factor will have motion sickness. Some people without any risk factors get motion sickness.

Children ages 2 to 12 years old are very likely to get motion sickness. Babies and toddlers rarely get motion sickness.

Women are more likely to have motion sickness, especially if they are:

- Pregnant.
- Menstruating.
- Taking hormone supplements.

People who get migraine headaches are more likely to have motion sickness during a migraine. The reverse is also true. People with a history of migraines are more likely to get one when they have motion sickness. Migraine headaches cause intense throbbing or pulsing in one area of the head. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting and extreme sensitivity to light and sound.

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People who think they will be sick are more likely to have symptoms.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider will first ask about your medical history and symptoms. He or she will perform a physical exam. This helps the health care provider tell if your symptoms are caused by motion sickness.

Motion sickness is diagnosed based on:

- A description of the symptoms.
- The type of activity you were doing when the symptoms happened.



Tell your health care provider about all of the activities that cause you to feel sick. This could include car trips, boating or amusement park rides.

Treatment

You may be able to prevent your symptoms by taking medication before an activity that causes motion sickness. The most common medications used to treat motion sickness are antihistamines. These are normally used to treat people with allergies.

Many antihistamines are sedatives. This means they can make you drowsy. Non-sedating antihistamines are available. However, they are less effective in treating motion sickness.

Your health care provider may suggest that you take Vitamin B6 with an antihistamine. Vitamin B6 is available as a supplement pill. A lack of B6 in the body could cause nausea. Vitamin B6 is part of the B vitamin complex. It is a natural vitamin found in meats, whole grain products and vegetables. It is also found in nuts and bananas. Vitamin B6 can be taken as a supplement, or pill.



Other medications used to treat motion sickness are:

- Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine[®]).
- Scopolamine (Transderm Scop[®]).

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Talk to your health care provider to find out more about medications used to treat motion sickness. All medications have certain risks and benefits. You may need to try the medication first to see if it helps you. Some prescription medications may make nausea worse. Check with your health care provider to make sure none of your medications make your motion sickness worse.

Treatment may also include exposure therapy. Some providers think that exposure to motions that cause motion sickness will lessen symptoms. Most people do not want to feel sick and do not choose this type of treatment. Most patients prefer to be treated with medication.

Prevention

There are things you can do to treat or manage motion sickness. You should prepare for motion sickness by being aware of the situations that cause your symptoms.

Another way to prevent motion sickness has to do with where you sit or stand. For example, if you get sick when riding in the back of a car, bus or boat, try riding in the front instead. If you can't ride in front, try keeping your head still. Rest it against the back of the seat in front of you. You can also try to face forward during travel. This may help keep the motion sensed by your eyes and ears the same.

Other people find that looking at things that are far away can help. For example, looking out the window of a plane while flying may help the brain realize you are moving. While on a boat, looking at the spot where the water meets the sky may help.

Some people eat before an activity or travel to prevent motion sickness. Other people may find that this makes their symptoms worse. These people should not eat spicy and greasy foods before they travel. They should also avoid overeating. If you start feeling sick, eating crackers or drinking a carbonated beverage may help. This is often used to settle the stomach during an illness.

Try to avoid smoking. Do not sit near smokers when you feel motion sickness. The smell of the smoke may make you nauseous. You can also try reducing your sensory input. This means the sights, sounds and smells around you. Try putting in ear plugs to block noise or lying flat to limit movement. Look at the horizon or shut your eyes.



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Some people get relief from their symptoms by using scented air fresheners. Mint and lavender scents seem to help. Ginger is a spice that is often used as a home remedy for motion sickness. Sucking on cough drops may help as well.

Summary

Motion sickness is a common problem in people traveling by car, train, airplanes and especially boats. Motion sickness can start suddenly, with a queasy feeling and cold sweats. It can then lead to dizziness, nausea and vomiting.

Your brain senses movement by getting signals from your inner ears, eyes, muscles and joints. When it gets signals that do not match, you can get motion sickness. For example, down below on a boat, your inner ear senses motion, but your eyes cannot tell you are moving.

The most common symptom of motion sickness is nausea, or feeling sick to your stomach. This can lead to vomiting.

Other common symptoms of motion sickness include:

- Abdominal pain.
- Dizziness, also called vertigo.
- Feeling very tired.

Motion sickness is diagnosed based on:

- A description of the symptoms.
- The type of activity you were doing when the symptoms happened.

Exposure therapy may be used as treatment to help lessen symptoms. This treatment exposes you to the type of motion that makes you sick to help you get used to it. But treatments that won't make you sick are also available. Most cases of motion sickness are treated with medication.

There are things you can do to prevent the symptoms of motion sickness. It helps to be aware of the situations that cause your symptoms. This includes things like sensory input, such as certain sights, sounds and smells.



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There are certain areas where motion is less felt during travel. Try sitting in:

- A seat near the front of a train, next to a window. Sit facing forward.
- Cabins in the front or middle of a ship, near the water level.
- The driver's seat or front passenger's seat of a car.
- The seat over the front edge of a wing on a plane. Direct air flow from a vent at your face.

By working with your health care provider, you can identify the situations that cause your motion sickness. Learning what triggers your motion sickness can help you overcome it or better prepare for it, making travel more enjoyable.



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