

Patient information

Acoustic Neuroma / Vestibular Schwannoma

Ear Nose And Throat Department – Aintree Hospital

An acoustic neuroma (AN) also known as a vestibular schwannoma, is a slow growing benign (non-cancerous) tumour arising from the balance and hearing nerve in the inner ear.

The cause is usually unknown and it affects men and women equally being most commonly diagnosed between the ages of 30 and 60 years.

Symptoms can include:

- hearing loss
- tinnitus in one ear
- Balance problems in 50 percent of people
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- neck pain
- reduced activity
- Fatigue
- loss of confidence, some people may also feel anxious due to a combination of all the other symptoms.

Diagnosis:

During your appointment you will be fully examined if necessary an MRI

will be carried out and if this reveals an acoustic neuroma you will be referred to a Neurosurgeon for further options to be discussed.

Options:

Medical Management

Annual Surveillance Monitoring (Watch and Wait)

If the tumour is small (less than 1.5cm) the recommendation will be for you to have annual MRI scans to monitor for any changes. If there is no change in size over a few years, the neurosurgeon may extend the interval between scans.

If the tumour grows to >1.5cm alternative treatments may be discussed by your neurosurgeon with you- see below.

Surgery

An operation to remove the tumour may be considered, depending on the size and location/position of the tumour.

Radiotherapy

For smaller tumours radiotherapy may be an option. All treatment options will be discussed between you and your neurosurgeon.

Physiotherapy

If, at any of the stages above, you experience troublesome dizziness and balance problems, your doctor/ENT specialist/neurosurgeon may refer you to a Specialist Balance Physiotherapist.

The Physiotherapist will take a detailed history of your symptoms and how they are impacting on your life.

They will test your eye and head movements and balance in various positions and the assessment may include testing of your muscle strength and other factors that may be impacting on your balance and mobility.

You may then be offered vestibular rehabilitation designed to improve your balance and reduce your dizziness.

An individual treatment plan will then be drawn up working towards achieving your realistic goals e.g. returning to work, previous hobbies.

Physiotherapy treatment may include tailored exercises for you to do at home that include eye and head movements and some that challenge your balance.

The exercises may be difficult, especially initially, as your balance is being challenged in order to improve.

These exercises will be written down, with instructions regarding how many / how often / how long to continue / how to progress.

The physiotherapist will support you through this process and adapt the exercises as necessary.

Progress may be slow at times and the goal that you are aiming for will be broken down into small achievable chunks to work on in stages.

As well as doing your prescribed exercises, you will also be encouraged to engage in your normal activities your physiotherapist can give you advice regarding sport and hobbies.

Activities such as Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi have been shown to improve balance but any activity that includes head and body movement will help rehabilitate your balance function.

What else can I do to help myself?

Other things that will support your recovery are:

- Keep positive, be patient, accept support from those around you.
- Don't avoid doing things you enjoy doing that make you slightly dizzy.
- Any physical activity will promote balance and general fitness-some of these you may need to build up gradually. Choose something that you enjoy.

Try something different as it is only by challenging our balance that it improves.

Aintree Balance Support Group: (ABSG)

We have set up a monthly support group, for long term education, exercise ideas, relaxation, and group support. Please discuss with your therapist if this is something you would like to join.

Website information:
Balance-and-dizziness.com

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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