

Chris Morrow: Fitness for elderly with Meniere's Disease

Chris Morrow has Meniere's disease and teaches mature aged adults fitness from 60 onwards. She holds two classes per week. The classes are aerobic for 35 minutes, strength and balance 25 minutes and then cool down and stretch.

Chris is 69 and says she is not an easy taskmaster. Attendees have to work towards their fitness. Her classes are based on falls prevention and improving quality of life.

She has been teaching for 31 years is a qualified Mature Age adult Trainer Personal Trainer. Class fees are \$8 a class.

CHRIS' STORY:

My teaching is probably the most important thing I do for myself, and my clients. It helps to keep my body strong which also improves gives me my balance, keeps my salt levels lower, keeps me from dropping into depression on my bad days with MD.

My MD is not as bad as most sufferers. However, in saying that my attacks are in hospital when it gets to 4 hours vomiting.

My mum has had MD for 40+ years, my brother was diagnosed about 4 years ago, and my younger brother now has the tinnitus, my sister has pain in the back of her head near her ear, some minor hearing loss and balance issues but not MD. So you can see there is a history that tells me this could be a hereditary thing for us

Mine started approximately 15 years ago, with vertigo, tinnitus and vomiting. I wasn't aware of MD then as my mum was never diagnosed with MD. I started having attacks every now and again.

My work colleagues started realising I wasn't hearing them. I thought I was suffering with sinus and my ear kept blocking up. It was progressively getting worse over time.

I began to have cluster attacks still not knowing what it was. This sent me to my doctor who referred me to an ENT. His words to me were "You have classic Meniere's Disease go home and learn to live with it. You will need hearing aids in the future as you will be deaf in your left ear eventually".

To say the least, he was brief and to the point, I walked out feeling upset and scared. I had perfect hearing, now I was losing it at a rate of knots every time I had an attack. It got so bad with an attack, I would lose bodily functions. No one mentioned my diet or stress or how hard this was going to be. I began online looking for help, it was hard at first there wasn't a lot of people knew anything about MD. Since then I've learned to be aware of the processed foods with salt. My caffeine had to be decaf and wine had to be a glass or two only. My life became a matter of look before you leap with food.

Stress is a huge trigger. I am my husband's carer, and he is often in and out of hospital. So no end to stress! Four and a half years ago I went into remission after a very frightening drop attack that took 9 hours for me to be able to stand up.

I decided that day, I was going to take back my life and fight this thing with everything I had. Diet, lowering my stress, trying to keep up teaching even though I was often sitting or lying down in the middle of a class and then not being able to drive home. I cut back hard on salt laden foods, pushed on with my exercise to help with the stress. I was taking Valium to help with the attacks, which worked sometimes and not others, I found if I left it too long to take it, it was too late. I also use a tablet called Zofran.

I had to have my ears and hearing aids checked, I was told I had wax in my ears. "Go get your ears washed out" she said.....never ever washout your ears with MD. In hindsight it was the worst thing I could do, I had an MD attack of all MD attacks. I lost more hearing in my left ear significantly and my right ear was now ringing with tinnitus and I had lost hearing in it too....so now I'm bilateral.

Yes it's not easy, the ears aren't equal in deafness so I am more right sided than left. If I have an attack both ears are affected badly. I'm losing my hearing quickly in my right ear now. It's isolating and frustrating and very difficult when people really don't see the disease and don't understand what's happening inside your head. Since my washout I've had more attacks often weeks apart, some lasting weeks, some depending on getting that Valium in before it escalates. I had an attack yesterday at the airport without warning. It came on with my eyes turning and my balance gone. Upsettingly I asked for a cup of water to take my Valium, the response was sorry we can't give you free water you have to buy a bottle. A lady saw me go down and went up and demanded the water. I was lucky and 20 minutes later the Valium started to kick in, I then took my nausea tablet and just waited to be sure I can walk. By the time my dad was to go on the flight I was 80% better but suffered brain fog right up to today teaching my class.

Bilateral means tinnitus now in both ears. Feeling full in both ears. My balance is great when I'm not having attacks. My head feels full most of the time and the noise now is now harder to tolerate as it seems to scream more now. Any external noise stops you hearing pretty much, even with \$3000 hearing aids. I do have a Sound Gate, which goes around my neck and it picks up my mobile phone calls and sends the call to my hearing aids. It's a blessing to have. I can manipulate the sound up or down to hear a little better. My hearing is distorted and often muffled like someone has a cloth or pillow over the ear. In socialising I feel very isolated and feel uncomfortable if I need to ask people to repeat themselves.