Burnout: Myth or Reality?

Every now and then the subject of burnout pops up in regards to Meniere’s disease. But do you know what it means? Is it even real? I am not going to try to answer the questions, but I will give you my take on it.

Everyone who has this disease is looking for relief from the horrible vertigo that comes with it. Many things are offered up as solutions and remedies. Some help, some don’t. Some can, some never will. But what is this “burnout” thing we keep hearing about?

First off, there is times when the symptoms and attacks will lessen and maybe go away completely. If they come back, that was not burnout. That was the natural nastiness of this disease playing with your head. It was Meniere’s way of tricking you into believing that you were in the clear. Some call that remission.

**Burnout, as I see it is something more than that.** Many would like it to be a time of no more symptoms at all. No more off-balance life. No more vertigo. No more hearing fluctuations. No more tinnitus.
But everything I have seen and read says something different. Burnout isn’t a return to your former life because the disease went away. What it is is more subtle, yet more permanent.

**Burnout may not be the fun and games car guys have. Lots of smoke from the tires and drive home. It can be something much more devious.**

First, maybe we should see if it is real. In my opinion it is. My Dr. agrees. I am fortunate enough to go to one of the major medical centers in the world, and somehow, I ended up with the chair of the Otorhinolarynglogy department as my Dr. I have no idea how that happened, but I’m glad it did. At one of my appointments, I mentioned burnout. I didn’t use that word, but it was understood that is what I meant. His reply to me was that in every single documented case of Meniere’s disease, there is a point at which the vertigo becomes less severe, and less frequent—burnout. That’s good enough for me. I’m sure he has viewed a few more case files than have I and attended a few more conferences on the subject, so when he says it happens, it happens.

That’s the good news. The bad news is what he continued with, and that is that while in every single case it happens, there is absolutely no way to tell when that will happen, or at what level of damage. They only know it has happened after the fact. I’m guessing the only way to really tell is by patients telling them that they no longer have the violent attacks, and that only happens after the patient realizes that they have gone x number of weeks, months, years, without them.

The less mentioned aspect has to do with the last part of his statement—or at what level of damage. That’s the kicker. No one wants to hear the word damage. What does it really mean, anyway? It can be a real wildcard. Maybe you only need hearing aids, maybe you are completely deaf. Maybe you can resume most of your life, maybe you have no balance function at all and can only function well in well-lit areas on level surfaces. It can be either end, or somewhere in between. And, again, you won’t know until you get there.

Doesn’t that sound fun? Not only do we have a disease that can’t really be predicted, as far as the attacks go, it also can’t be predicted how debilitating in may be, until it is.
While it may be fun to go to a drag race and watch the cars do their burnout in order to get the tires hot for better traction, and we may think that this may cause a little pain for a little while, but long term, it may not be so bad, the reality is that burnout may leave us feeling more like the burnt out car sitting along the side of the road. Nothing left but the shell.

While no one would want the vertigo attacks and drop attacks to continue, the alternative of burnout may not be the pleasant afterglow we were hoping for, either. My doctor had these words for me concerning that aspect as well. I had asked him what would happen if I lost all the function in my right ear in the same manner as I had in the left. He replied that I “would be able to function, but likely would be unstable.” Not something any person wants to hear.

So to me, that would be burnout. I’m already deaf. I could become unstable. Fun, huh?

Dennis