

Diving and seasickness

Seasickness is known as kinetosis by doctors and health professionals, the literal translation being “motion sickness”. As the name implies, motion sickness can also occur in cars, trains or planes. Among the symptoms are nausea, vomiting, dizziness and sweating, which can lead to a circulation collapse in rare cases.

Seasickness is caused when the brain receives different pieces of information. The sense of balance reports that the surface on which you are standing is rocking from side to side; the feet report that this surface is solid. Sooner or later the brain gives in and reports back that you feel sick.

Prevention

Here are a few recommendations to prevent kinetosis:

1. Do not eat or drink too much before going on a trip in a boat; a full stomach is conducive to nausea.
2. Coffee and alcohol consumption can make nausea worse.
3. During the boat trip, stay as near to the centre of the vessel as possible and do not go below deck. Keep looking at the horizon and do not stare at the wall of the cabin, read or assemble any diving equipment.
4. Only enter the water if you have not had any nausea. From experience, we know that nausea should no longer affect you from a depth of 3 to 5 metres, unless there is a heavy swell.
5. Drink sufficient fluids right before diving (ideally water) and then go straight into the water. This considerably reduces the risk of decompression sickness, even if you feel nauseous once more after the dive.

Medicinal solutions

Unfortunately, there are still no medications which prevent or alleviate the symptoms of motion sickness that are also compatible with diving. All medicinal products have side effects which affect the central nervous system, causing tiredness, slower reaction times, dizziness or adverse effects on your vision and coordination.

Scopoderm® TTS patches are effective, for instance, but can impair the reaction of the pupils. Resulting problems with your vision may also cause disorientation. The popular Vomex® A may also cause slower reaction times, drowsiness and dizziness – symptoms that can have very serious consequences under water.

Ginger preparations used in naturopathy or Cocculu D12 preparations used in homeopath are both free from any such side effects, but their effectiveness stays highly controversial.

So-called ‘Sea bands’ offer an interesting alternative. These elastic wristbands are fitted with a raised plastic button

which is placed in such a way that it exerts a gentle and yet permanent pressure on the inner side of the wrist. This stimulates an acupuncture point, which should then relieve nausea and vomiting. A crew of ocean racing yachts for instance tested these wristbands and a significant reduction in complaints about seasickness could be observed. However, there is also a lack of scientific proof of their effectiveness.



There is some hope, because the reactions to cope with stimuli produced by motion can be trained: i.e. when people are at sea for a certain amount of time, sooner or later almost everyone gets used to the rocking motion of the boat. Astronauts, who have to work in weightlessness, a feeling of constant free fall, learn to experience weightlessness in “Vomit Comets” (aviation doctors' slang): by making numerous repeated vertical dives from great heights in these aircrafts, they have to get used to this feeling – and it works!