



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the labyrinth (fluid-filled canals and sacs) in the inner ear. The labyrinth contains the vestibular system, which controls a person's balance and eye movement. It also contains the cochlea, which controls hearing. Labyrinthitis may affect one or both ears. It can affect all ages, including children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Vertigo. A sensation that you or your surroundings are spinning around. Head movements make it worse.
- Hearing loss (one or both ears; may be mild or severe).
- Involuntary eye movement.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Loss of balance (may fall toward the affected side).
- Ringing in the ear (tinnitus).
- Feeling of fullness in the ears.

CAUSES

The exact cause of the inflammation is sometimes unknown or unclear. It may result from an infection or trauma. The whole inner ear is about the size of a dime, so inflammation often affects both hearing and balance.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Bacterial infection in the middle ear.
- Upper respiratory viral infection.
- Cholesteatoma (a type of cyst in the middle ear).
- Head injury.
- Stress or fatigue.
- Allergies or family history of allergies.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol use.
- Use of some prescription or nonprescription drugs.
- Heart, brain, or blood-vessel disease.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Obtain prompt medical care for ear infections.
- Don't take drugs that have caused dizziness symptoms for you in the past.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The disorder usually resolves on its own in 1 to 6 weeks. Treatment can help relieve symptoms. Some mild vertigo symptoms may continue for several months.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Injuries from falls that occur due to vertigo.
- Permanent hearing loss on the affected side (rare).



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do an exam of the ears and your eye movements. Your head and body may be placed or moved in different positions to help determine what movements bring on the symptoms. You may be asked to walk so your balance can be checked. Medical tests may include hearing tests and others as needed to determine any underlying disorder.
- Treatment includes steps to treat any underlying disorder, rest, and drugs for symptoms if needed.
- Surgical removal of cholesteatoma (an infected collection of debris in the middle ear) and drainage of infected areas may be needed.

MEDICATIONS

- Your health care provider may prescribe:
 - Antinausea drugs (oral or suppositories).
 - Tranquilizers to reduce dizziness.
 - Diuretics to decrease excess fluid in the inner ear.
 - Antibiotics for bacterial infection.
 - Antivirals for virus infection.
 - Antihistamines to relieve symptoms.

ACTIVITY

Keep the head as still as possible. Rest in bed until vertigo stops. Then resume your normal activities gradually. Avoid activities, such as driving, climbing, or working around dangerous machinery until symptoms clear up.

DIET

No special diet is needed. Nausea and vomiting symptoms may make eating difficult. Drink clear liquids and eat bland foods until symptoms improve.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of labyrinthitis.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Decreased hearing in either ear.
 - Persistent vomiting.
 - Convulsions or fainting.
 - Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page