Labyrinthitis

Definition and symptoms
Labyrinthitis is an inflammation of a structure within your inner ear called the labyrinth. It contains the delicate structures that control your hearing and balance. When one side is affected, the information sent to your brain about balance and movement will differ from that sent from the unaffected side. This difference can make you feel dizzy and that you are moving when you are actually still (vertigo). You may lose your balance, especially towards the affected side. Headache and nystagmus (uncontrollable flickering of the eyes) can also be present. Hearing can also feel reduced and there may be ringing in your ears (tinnitus) on that side. You often feel nauseous and vomit.

Labyrinthitis is usually caused by a virus but it can sometimes be from a bacterial infection. You tend to recover after a few weeks, but very occasionally you can have long-term problems with hearing and balance. This tends to be true of those with bacterial labyrinthitis.

Treatment
Viral labyrinthitis usually lasts between one and three weeks. Your body will fight the virus on its own, so treatment is designed to reduce any symptoms you may be feeling. Sometimes, hospital admission is needed if symptoms are severe.

Your doctor may prescribe medicine to reduce your dizziness (vestibular suppressants) and your sickness (anti-emetics). You should drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. You may be given a drip (intravenous fluids) in hospital to hydrate you until you can drink enough yourself.

Bacterial labyrinthitis is treated with antibiotics to fight the infection.

In its early days, labyrinthitis can make you feel constantly dizzy and give you severe vertigo. To minimise these feelings:
• Lie still in a comfortable position, on your side is often best.
• Avoid stimulants like coffee, alcohol, sugar, salt and smoking.
• Avoid bright lights.
• Reduce noise and stress from the area around you.

Discharge advice
• Your doctor will advise you on a suitable recovery period, but in general two to three weeks rest at home is required. Do not drive, operate machinery or carry out any strenuous activity until fully recovered. If a sick certificate is needed, please ask the medical staff for one before you leave the ward.
• The symptoms of labyrinthitis can return. You should not drive, work at heights, or operate heavy machinery for at least one week from the time your symptoms end.
• Take any medication as prescribed. The nurses will explain how and when these should be taken.
• Follow a healthy diet, avoiding stimulants such as alcohol and coffee. Also, stop or reduce smoking. Staff can provide advice, aids (e.g., nicotine patches) and support group contacts to help you quit.

Contact f5 if you have any concerns following discharge or if you experience worsening symptoms.
Contact information
F5 ward: 023 8120 6511
023 8120 4644

NHS 111: 111

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