

Labyrinthitis and Vestibular Neuritis

What are labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis?

Labyrinthitis is an inflammation of the inner ear. Vestibular neuritis is an inflammation of the nerves connecting the inner ear to the brain.

The inner ear is made up of a system of fluid-filled tubes and sacs called the labyrinth. The labyrinth contains an organ for hearing called the cochlea. It also contains the vestibular system, which helps you keep your balance.

What is the cause?

These conditions often, although not always, happen after a cold. Another virus similar to the herpes virus can cause an infection in both the vestibular system and the inner ear. The infection causes swelling and inflammation of either the vestibular nerves or the inner ear. Sometimes the inner ear is infected by bacteria that spread from a middle ear infection.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis are:

- Dizziness or vertigo (feeling like the room is spinning)
- Trouble keeping your balance
- Nausea and vomiting

Vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis are rarely painful. If you have pain with dizziness, get checked right away.

After a few days, the symptoms may decrease so that you have symptoms only when you move suddenly. A sudden turn of the head is the most common movement that causes symptoms.

How are they diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Often, no tests are needed. However, if your symptoms last for more than a month, your symptoms get worse, or you have new symptoms, tests may include:

- A hearing test
- An electronystagmogram (ENG), which checks eye movements as a way to get information about the vestibular system. It also measures the effect of your head position on dizziness.
- An MRI scan to make sure that you have not had a stroke and don't have a brain tumor. An MRI uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves to show detailed pictures of the brain.
- Blood tests to check for conditions such as diabetes, thyroid disorders, Lyme disease, or blood vessel disease

How are they treated?

Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicines to reduce nausea and dizziness. The medicines often cause drowsiness, so you may not be able to keep your usual schedule or do your usual activities.

If your nausea and vomiting cannot be controlled, you may need to go to the hospital for treatment to keep you from getting dehydrated.

If you have an infection, you may also take medicine to treat the infection.

It usually takes 3 to 4 weeks to recover from vestibular neuritis or labyrinthitis. You will probably need bed rest for 1 or 2 weeks. You may be left with some mild dizziness when you move your head, which can last for several years. Usually vestibular neuritis happens no more than once in a lifetime.

How can I take care of myself?

- If you are having a lot of nausea, drink clear fluids only, such as water, weak tea, and bouillon. You may need to sip liquids or only drink small amounts often until the nausea gets better. Eat bland foods such as soda crackers, toast, plain pasta, noodles, bananas, and baked or boiled potatoes.
- When you are feeling dizzy, avoid stairs, heights, and driving, and do not operate machinery.

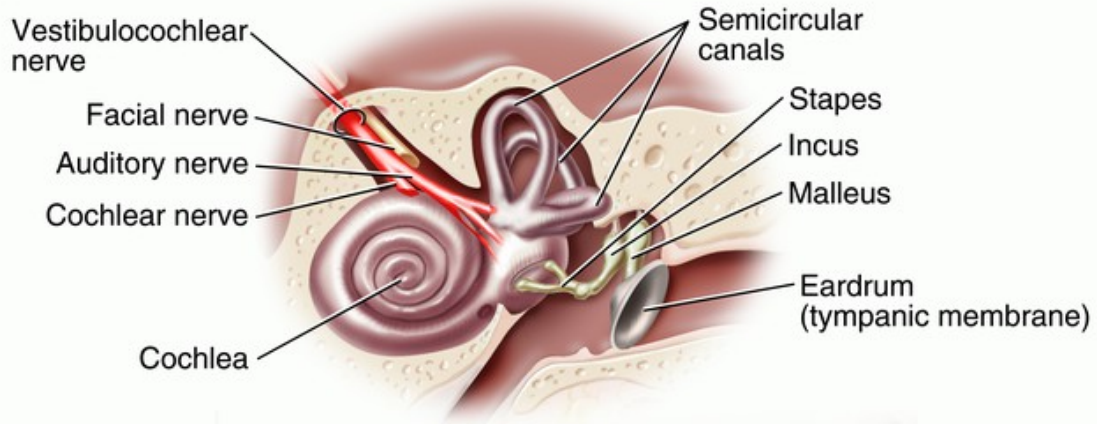
How can I help prevent vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis?

For some people, getting prompt antibiotic treatment of a middle ear infection may prevent labyrinthitis. Doctors don't know how to prevent infections of the inner ear caused by viruses.

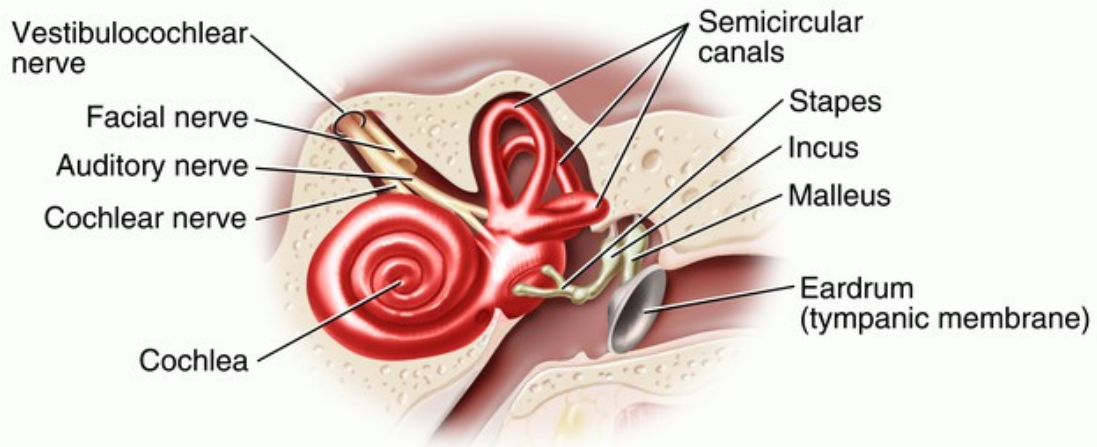
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Vestibular Neuritis and Labyrinthitis



Vestibular Neuritis
(inflammation of the nerves)



Labyrinthitis
(Inflammation of the inner ear)



Normal Ear

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