

Labyrinthitis

Acute labyrinthitis is thought to be caused by a virus. It is thought that the virus irritates the balance mechanism that is located in the inner ear. The balance mechanism is called the semicircular canals or the labyrinth: hence the name.

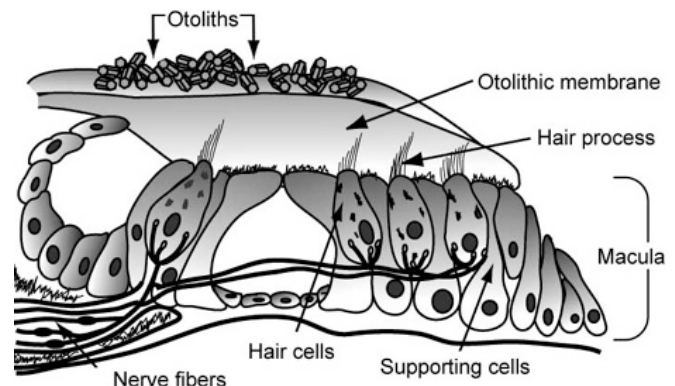
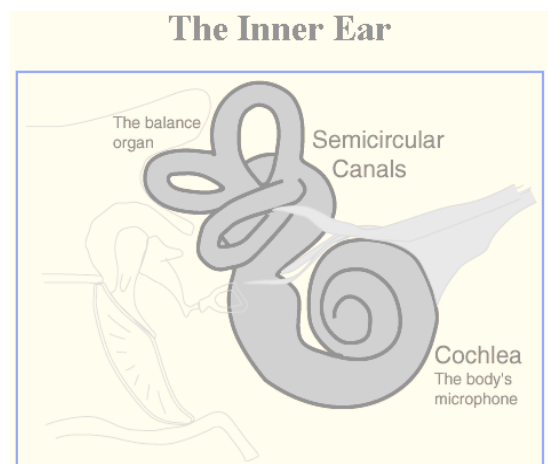
With this condition people have difficulty with balance and sometimes get nauseous. Lying down quickly or sudden changes in movement can cause the room to spin. We need to make a difference between this and just feeling a little lightheaded when you get up quickly. Sometimes people have a difficult time driving because as they look over their shoulder, everything starts spinning again. If that's the case with you, make sure you're not driving until this is a little bit better. This can take some time to resolve.

Because the inner ear is deeply embedded in the temporal bone, it is difficult to study this disease. Very few people would want to have their skull opened up just to find out what kind of virus that's in the inner ear when this disease strikes. What little we know is based on MRI scans and the occasional pathology specimen from trauma. We believe the hair cells get an otolith stuck on top of them causing an abnormal stimulation of this organ that normally tells us when things are spinning.

Acute labyrinthitis can take up to six weeks to resolve. It is a very annoying disease and some people get plenty frustrated with the disease before it leaves them. There is really no known treatment since this is a virus. If we catch the disease early enough, you may benefit by the medication prednisone. You will know rather quickly if prednisone helps you, as it should act within the first day. If you are not lucky enough to have benefit from that, there is one medication that some people find helpful. It is called Antivert (Meclizine). Remember that Antivert doesn't get rid of the disease; it only makes the symptoms more tolerable. The medicine may make you quite tired so be careful if you take it and drive or if you work in an area that requires your full attention.

Complications of the disease are rare. However, there maybe some overlap in these symptoms with more serious disorders. So if you have any ringing of the ears, hearing loss, progressive vomiting, headache or fever, please return either to the office or to the emergency room immediately.

Whenever a problem is slow to resolve like this one, miracle cures on the internet (for a price of course) will pop up. I heard there is a UTube video teaching how to do the Epley maneuver. It might make it worse. If this persists we can refer you to a very specially trained physical therapist. The maneuver they will try is called the Epley maneuver and it works 1/2 the time and makes things worse 1/3 of the time! Hopefully yours won't persist, and certainly we expect to hear from you if hearing loss or pain develops.



Tsg 2017

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