Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Labyrinthitis

Version number: **3**
Last modified date: **25th November 2026**

Patient Information

ENT Department

The Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website is available on the link: https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets or scan the QR code.

- Author ID: RS
- Leaflet Ref: ENT 004
- Version: 3
- Leaflet title: Labyrinthitis
- Date Produced: December 2024
- Expiry Date: December 2026

What is Labyrinthitis?

Labyrinthitis, also known as vestibular neuronitis, is a common inner ear condition, which can cause symptoms of vertigo.

Vertigo is the sensation that you or the environment around you is moving or spinning. Vertigo is commonly caused by a problem with the way balance works in the inner ear.

The symptoms of vertigo may come on suddenly and may affect your walking or ability to go outside. Generally, your symptoms should start to improve within a few days.

These symptoms can vary in severity from:

- Very mild unsteadiness to more violent vertigo (spins)
- Dizziness
- Difficulties with balance and walking
- Nausea and vomiting
- Difficulty with vision and occasionally hearing loss may result.

Occasionally medication can help in the early days if you are vomiting or very nauseous, but it should not be taken in the long term.

Whilst many patients are completely free of symptoms within a few weeks, others can have chronic dizziness for many months.

Common complaints

You may also experience other common complaints, such as:

- Frequent headaches, even migraine
- Reduced concentration
- Discomfort in busy places, typically shopping centres
- Increased fatigue, as well as often becoming quite emotional
- Difficulty reading, especially computer screens.

Generally, any associated symptoms will naturally reduce as your balance problem improves. However, at times you may need specific help to address these varied problems.

Diagnosis of Labyrinthitis

Diagnosis is usually made by listening to your symptoms. There are many other medical conditions which cause vertigo, so you will be asked questions to help exclude them.

Vestibular rehabilitation exercises

This is a specific form of physiotherapy which may be suggested if your movements are very affected. It helps to retrain the brain's ability to adjust the balance problem and is known as compensation and adaption.

To enable this to work fully, you will need to be dedicated to doing exercises regularly through the day for several months, even though they may seem to increase your dizziness initially.

Exercise 1

- Place a small target that you can focus on at eye level. Keep your eyes fixed on this target whilst you turn your head to the left and right.
- Try to build up to repeating for one minute.
- Repeat this exercise first in sitting and again in standing if possible.
- Within a few days/weeks of doing this, aim to do the above as you walk forwards and backwards, whilst still moving your head. For safety, make sure you are close to a secure supportive surface.

Exercise 2

- Practise standing with your feet together then progress to balancing on one leg, building up to 20 seconds as you improve. When this gets easier, repeat, but challenge your balance by closing your eyes.

- For safety, make sure you are close to a secure supportive surface.

What else can I do?

Go for a walk outside each day and aim to walk further every few days. Whilst initially you may feel as if you are staggering, with daily perseverance this will improve gradually over time.

Walking every day and doing gentle exercise at home will give your balance system a much better chance of improving. You should try to limit the time you spend resting on the sofa or bed in the daytime.

Physiotherapy

Some patients continue with a milder balance problem several months after onset despite the above advice.

If you have been seen by the Balance Clinic, you may be referred for some specific input from the physiotherapy team. The physiotherapist will give you rehabilitation exercises for your specific problem for you to work through.

If you undertake the exercises and advice given, your symptoms should improve considerably.

Will my Labyrinthitis re-occur?

Whilst this is very unlikely, some patients may suffer a return of symptoms.

This is often triggered by stress, extreme tiredness and/or following a different illness or period of prolonged inactivity and may leave you feeling more unsteady.

At such times, it is important that you restart any exercises and advice you were previously given; your symptoms will typically settle again over several weeks.

You do not need to be seen again in the Balance Clinic, although your GP may re-refer you if it is appropriate.

Contact information

If you require further information, please contact us on the following number:

Telephone number: ……..……..

Further information

The following websites may be useful:

www.dizziness-and-balance.com

www.Vestibular.org



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