

VESTIBULAR NEURONITIS

The inner ears are the major mechanisms of maintaining balance and are connected to the brain by the auditory nerves. Each nerve has two divisions, the hearing (cochlear) nerve and two balance (vestibular) nerves. The balance function of the ears is prone to [sudden malfunction](#) that causes profound loss of balance. The precise nature of the problem is ill understood, as the condition is not fatal; the tissues of the ear and the balance nerves cannot be studied at the time of these problems. It is thought that the problem is due to viral infection in the balance nerves, although why the hearing division is not affected simultaneously is uncertain. Another possibility is blockage of the branch of the artery of the ear that supplies the balance mechanisms themselves.

Characteristics:

The onset of the dizziness is sudden, the patient commonly becoming disabled by a severe spinning sensation (rotatory vertigo), accompanied by nausea and vomiting, which may last 1-2 days, worse when moving. There is no deafness, tinnitus or other ear symptoms, and no sensation of loss of consciousness or faintness, and the patient may have no other symptoms of illness that might be related.

The spinning sensation fades, to be replaced by gross unsteadiness if the head is moved (dysequilibrium). This is due to loss of balance function on the affected side. With time, as the brain compensates for the altered balance capability, the unsteadiness gradually settles. Intermittent spikes of unsteadiness may trouble the recovery, which may take up to 6-8 weeks, more rapidly in the younger patient; chronic unsteadiness may trouble the elderly. Audiology and radiology show no specific changes but balance testing (ENG) shows reduced function in the affected ear.

Treatment:

Medical treatment aims to minimise the nausea and unsteadiness, but do not cure the origins, which fortunately dissipate with time, helped by vestibular rehabilitation physiotherapy.

The clinical picture is thus one of a single episode of sudden vertigo, then imbalance, settling spontaneously but without other attendant ear or neurological symptoms. The condition is distinct from labyrinthitis, as this also destroys hearing.

More information:

[OTALGIA](#)

"Silverton Place"

101 Wickham Terrace
Brisbane Qld 4000

P: 07 38397677 F: 07 38325723

Other Locations

Beenleigh Sunnybank Mt Ommaney Caboolture