

A Guide to Hearing Loss

Understanding Hearing Loss

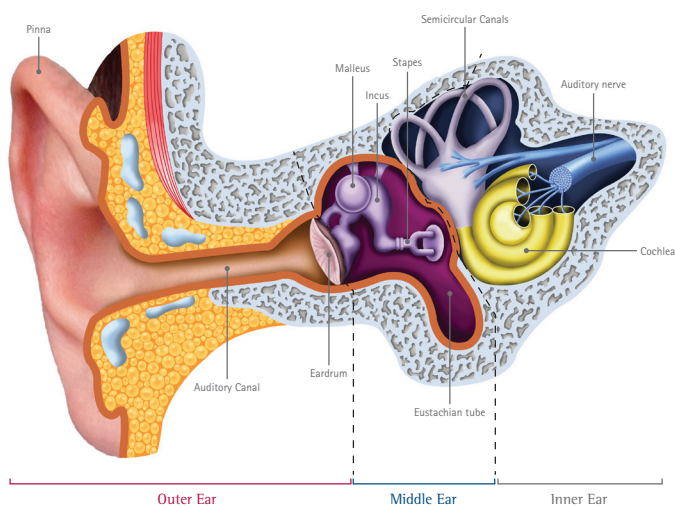


A voice can be deeply moving, conveying thoughts, emotions and feelings. Every spoken word consists of sounds and tones which create understanding and enable us to build and maintain relationships.

Hearing is participating

Hearing and understanding provide a vital link to the world around you. They enable you to communicate and interact with others and are a source of enjoyment and information. The sense of hearing is often taken for granted and its gradual deterioration can impact your ability to actively participate in life.





How we hear

When a sound enters the outer ear, it causes the ear drum to vibrate. The sound is transmitted by three small bones from the middle to the inner ear. The inner ear contains a snail-like shaped structure called the cochlea which is filled with fluid and lined with sensory cells with microscopic fine hairs. These hairs move with the vibrations and convert the sound waves into nerve impulses which are sent to the brain. The result is the sound you hear.



Causes of hearing loss

The outer ear

Typical conditions which may lead to hearing loss include excessive accumulation of earwax and infections of the ear canal.

The middle ear

Perforation of the eardrum, an infection or fluid in the middle ear are the most common causes of hearing loss in the middle ear. Many outer and middle ear problems can be treated by a doctor. In cases where treatment is not effective, remaining hearing loss can usually be helped by using hearing aids.

Hearing loss caused by conditions of the outer or middle ear is referred to as a conductive hearing loss.

The inner ear

The majority of hearing problems result from damage to the inner ear. Typical causes are the natural aging process, excessive exposure to noise, medication that is toxic to the auditory system and head injuries. Generally, hearing loss resulting from inner ear damage cannot be reversed by medical treatment, but can largely be improved with hearing aids. This type of hearing loss is referred to as a sensorineural hearing loss.



The impact of hearing loss

If you have a hearing loss you have to put in more effort to hear and understand. Having to do this constantly can be tiring and you may find yourself withdrawing from social activities because of this.

Hearing loss also affects the people around you. Conversations and interactions can become more strenuous, not only for you, but also for them. Studies show that people who took steps to address their hearing loss experience a noticeable improvement in many aspects of their lives.

When voices become less clear

Hearing loss can creep up gradually, without you realizing it at first. Some sounds remain audible while others become softer and harder to hear. As a result communication becomes increasingly challenging and requires more effort.

It is the higher pitched sounds that are often hardest to hear and understand. Softer, highpitched consonants like "s", "f", "sh" and "t" play a key role in our ability to understand speech clearly. This is why people with a hearing loss often say "I can hear, but I don't understand what's being said."

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Hearing loss also affects those with good hearing

Hearing loss affects approximately 500 million people worldwide. Although people of all ages can develop a hearing loss, those over 50 years of age are particularly affected. In fact, hearing loss is the third most common chronic disorder. Hearing loss is invisible and usually gradual, but it can have a profound influence on the person with hearing loss and everyone around them.

Restored communication means a significantly improved quality of life

For a new hearing aid wearer, the role of family, friends and colleagues is crucial, especially in the initial period of adjustment. The new hearing aid wearer needs your support and encouragement. Help them discover their hearing aid!



Practical advice for communicating with hearing aid wearers

Speak clearly and naturally

It is not necessary to shout – this will cause sound distortion and discomfort to the hearing aid wearer. Maintain a normal tone of voice, speak clearly and more slowly.

Move closer

Reduce the distance between you and the listener, especially when background noise is present.

Take the surroundings into account

Don't try to converse from one room to another or in rooms with distracting noises, such as a

washing machine, vacuum cleaner, loud music, etc. – this is likely to lead to mutual frustration.

Understand that using hearing aids can be tiring

When talking with a new hearing aid wearer, be aware of signs of fatigue. Don't force or prolong conversations if the listener is tired.

Be patient

Respect the pace of adjustment and encourage the person with hearing loss. Be a good listener and help them to achieve their goal of better hearing and understanding.



Take the first step

Evaluate your hearing

- ☐ Do people seem to be mumbling?
- ☐ Do you have to turn up the volume on the TV or radio?
- ☐ Do you find it easier to understand a man's voice compared to a woman's or a child's voice?
- ☐ Do you find it difficult to hear the doorbell or the telephone ring?
- ☐ When you are in a group or in a crowded restaurant, is it difficult for you to follow

the conversation?

- ☐ Do you tend to limit your social activities because it's difficult to hear and communicate?
- ☐ Has somebody close to you mentioned that you may have a problem with your hearing?

If you have answered "yes" to one or more of the questions, speak to a hearing care professional to have your hearing tested more thoroughly and get advice.



The next step

See a hearing healthcare professional

Making the decision to have your hearing tested is the first step towards improving your quality of life. A qualified hearing care professional can tell you whether you have a hearing loss and recommend the best course of action.