

Degree of Hearing Loss

- **Mild Hearing Loss (26-40 dB)**

A person with a mild hearing loss will have difficulty hearing faint or distant speech and understanding conversation or speech in a noisy environment.

- **Moderate Hearing Loss (41-55 dB)**

A person with moderate hearing loss would be able to hear if the speaker is speaking loudly and at no more than 3 to 5 feet away. They will also have trouble hearing with background noise and will have difficulty in group discussions.

- **Moderate-Severe Hearing Loss (56-70 dB)**

A person with a moderate - severe hearing loss can identify relatively loud environmental sounds and may be able to discriminate vowels better than consonants.

- **Severe Hearing Loss (71-90 dB)**

A person with a severe hearing loss will not be able to discriminate sounds or words without visual cues.

- **Profound (91 dB or higher)**

A person with a profound hearing loss may be able to hear very loud sounds but may be more aware of vibrations than of tonal patterns. They rely on vision rather than hearing as the primary sensory channel for communication.

Types of Hearing Loss

- **Conductive Hearing Loss** is caused by a mechanical disruption or blockage of the movement of sound waves at some point in the hearing system. A conductive hearing loss occurs when the sensory organ of hearing (cochlea) and the nerve function properly but there is difficulty in the outer or middle ear transmitting system. The sound cannot conduct properly to the inner ear (cochlea). Common causes of conductive hearing loss are earwax in the ear canal, punctured eardrum, fluid in the middle ear, abnormal bone growth, or a middle ear infection.

- **Sensorineural Hearing Loss** happens when there is damage to the inner ear (cochlea), the auditory nerve, or the hearing centers of the brain. Sensorineural loss is permanent. Sensorineural hearing loss may be caused by birth defects, head injury, tumors, illness, fever, certain drugs, poor blood circulation, or stroke. The degree of hearing loss can vary from person to person.

- **Mixed Hearing Loss** is a combination of conductive and sensorineural hearing loss in the same ear.

HEARING LOSSES



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Reactions to Hearing Loss

Gradual hearing loss can be very frustrating. The person may not realize what is happening and therefore not seek professional help. Some people may not admit they are having trouble hearing. If ignored or untreated, hearing problems can get worse. People who cannot hear well may become depressed or withdraw from others to avoid the frustration or embarrassment of not understanding what is being said. They may become suspicious of relatives or friends who they believe “mumble” or “do not speak up.” It is easy to mistakenly call a person with a hearing loss confused, unresponsive, or uncooperative just because they don't hear well. It is a mistake to assume that a person is not listening to you or ignoring you when he or she does not respond or responds inappropriately.

Getting Help

If you experience any of the following early warning signs, don't wait to seek help. You may have a medical problem that causes hearing loss. Your ears should be examined by a doctor and your hearing checked by an audiologist. Early recognition is important in getting treatment for the problem before the loss interferes with a person's lifestyle. Special training, hearing aids, assistive listening devices, certain medicines, and/or surgery are some of the choices that may help people with hearing problems.

Signs of Hearing Problems

- ✓ Difficulty hearing over the telephone
- ✓ Trouble following a conversation when two or more people are talking at the same time
- ✓ Straining to understand conversations
- ✓ Problems hearing because of background noise
- ✓ Feeling that others are always mumbling or not speaking clearly
- ✓ Difficulty understanding women and children talking
- ✓ TV and social events are less enjoyable
- ✓ Certain sounds are overly annoying or loud
- ✓ A hissing or ringing sound in the ears
- ✓ Avoiding groups or gatherings
- ✓ Misunderstood words in a conversation
- ✓ Saying “huh” and “what” more often
- ✓ Asking people to repeat what they've just said
- ✓ Turning the T.V. or radio volume up to the point it bothers others
- ✓ Inappropriate responses to questions

“Ignorance and poverty are the causes of much blindness. These are the enemies which destroy the rights of children and workmen, and undermine the health of mankind. These causes must be searched out ...and abolished.” Hellen Keller

Causes of Hearing Loss

There are many causes of hearing loss. Hearing loss may occur before birth or anytime in a person's life. Some losses may have no medical explanation. Following are common causes of hearing loss.

- Perforation of the eardrum due to infection or injury
- Head injury or other trauma that causes injury to the small bones of the middle ear
- Brain tumor
- Heredity - a family history of congenital or acquired hearing loss or deafness
- Use of certain drugs such as heavy doses of aspirin or other ototoxic drugs that harm the ear and certain drugs taken during pregnancy
- Viral or bacterial infectious diseases
- Cholesteatoma - abnormal tissue growth in the middle ear
- Immunologic diseases such as cytomegalovirus and meningitis
- Noise-induced hearing loss – a hearing loss resulting from overexposure to loud noise or intense impact noise, perhaps occurring gradually and without pain or suddenly without warning
- Stroke or circulatory problems
- Neurological causes
- Presbycusis (Aging) - the most prevalent type of hearing loss is a high frequency, permanent hearing loss that occurs with advancing age
- Otosclerosis - a common cause of gradual hearing loss in adults, it involves calcification of the ossicles (bones of the middle ear) that conduct sound to the inner ear
- Syndromic Hearing Loss – a hearing loss in association with other congenital or genetic abnormalities. The London Dysmorphology Database, Oxford Medical Publishers, lists 396 multiple anomaly syndromes in which hearing loss is listed as a significant feature of the condition.