

Hearing Loss

What is hearing loss?

Hearing loss can happen at any age. It can be a gradual or sudden decrease in the ability to hear sounds or conversation. It's important to get a hearing problem evaluated and treated because hearing loss can cause a problem with communication, language, and social skills.

Hearing loss is more common as people get older.

What causes hearing loss?

Hearing loss happens when there is a problem with one or more parts of the ear or hearing pathways.

There are different causes and types of hearing loss. The 4 main types of hearing loss are:

- Presbycusis
- Conductive deafness
- Central deafness
- Otosclerosis

Presbycusis (progressive loss of hearing)

Presbycusis is a gradual decline in sound reception that occurs as you get older. This happens because the eardrum loses some elasticity and the bones of the ear become stiffer. Men are usually more affected than women of the same age. Noise exposure throughout life may play a role in this type of hearing loss. At first you may have trouble understanding people with higher pitched voices, such as women and children. You also have difficulty with conversations in groups or with background noise. At the same time, loud noise may be painful, so when someone raises their voice in an effort to be heard, it may seem to you like they are shouting. If you have presbycusis, ask others to speak slowly and clearly. Hearing aids can be very helpful.

Conductive deafness

Conductive deafness happens when sound waves are blocked as they pass through the ear. People with conductive deafness hear sounds from outside as muffled, but their own voice may seem louder than normal. Because of this, they often speak softly. The most common cause of conductive deafness is ear wax. Removal of the wax, after first softening it, will make a lot of difference. Other causes of conductive deafness are ear infections, a tear or hole in the eardrum, and damage to the small bones in the inner ear that conduct sound waves.

Central deafness

Central deafness is far less common than either presbycusis or conductive deafness. Central deafness is due to a problem in the hearing centers in the brain. Sounds can be heard, but language cannot be understood. Central deafness may

follow a long illness with high fever, long exposure to loud noise, head injuries, stroke, tumors, and certain drugs. The deafness is permanent, but speech therapy may help communication.

Otosclerosis

Otosclerosis is a disorder of the bone around the inner ear. Another term for this disorder is otospongiosis, which means spongy bone. This disorder often occurs in the bones between the middle and the inner ear. Many people do not know that they have otosclerosis. When it affects the inner ear, it can cause deafness and dizziness. One or both ears may be affected. It is almost always accompanied by ringing in the ear, which is called tinnitus. Unlike some causes of hearing loss, a hearing loss caused by otosclerosis can be treated. Treatment includes surgery to stabilize or replace the small bones of the inner ear. Surgery can usually return hearing to a normal or near normal status. If surgery is not possible, a hearing aid may be helpful.

Hearing loss caused by medicines

Medicines can damage the ear and lead to a loss of hearing. Some medicines cause permanent damage, such as some antibiotics and many chemotherapy drugs used for cancer treatment. Others cause temporary hearing loss, such as aspirin, diuretics such as furosemide (Lasix), or anti-malaria drugs. Taking too much aspirin can cause hearing loss and ringing in the ears (tinnitus). Tell your healthcare provider if you think your medicine is affecting your hearing.

What should I do if I think my hearing is getting worse?

If your hearing is getting worse, see your healthcare provider. He or she will examine your ears and may recommend that you see an audiologist (hearing specialist) for special hearing tests. You may have earwax that needs to be removed. A hearing aid may be recommended. Hearing aids are devices that make sounds louder. Different hearing problems may need different kinds of hearing aids.

If you have a hearing problem, tell people about it and ask them to speak slowly and clearly. If you don't hear something the first time, ask people to repeat what they said a little more loudly. Ask people to face you when they speak, and watch their lips and body signs. When you are in a group or audience, listening to a speaker, learn where to sit so that you can hear best.

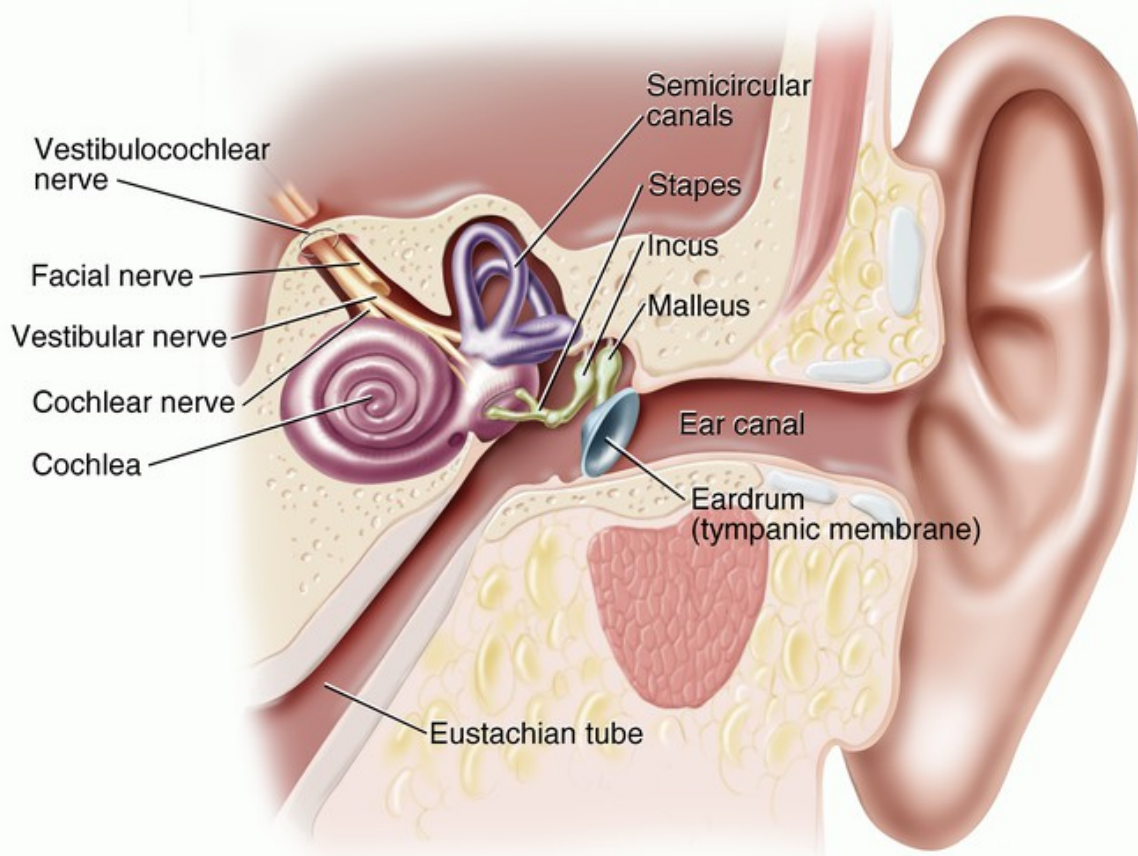
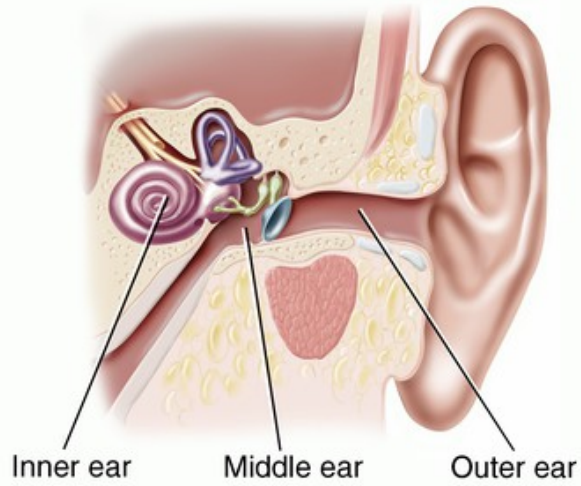
Amplified telephone receivers and amplified headsets for listening to music or watching television can be very helpful. You can also install a flashing light system in your home so you can know when someone is phoning you or ringing your doorbell. Many churches and auditoriums have special headphones installed for people with hearing problems. Take advantage of them.

Don't try to hide your hearing problem. It is nothing to be ashamed of and most hearing problems can be treated.

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