

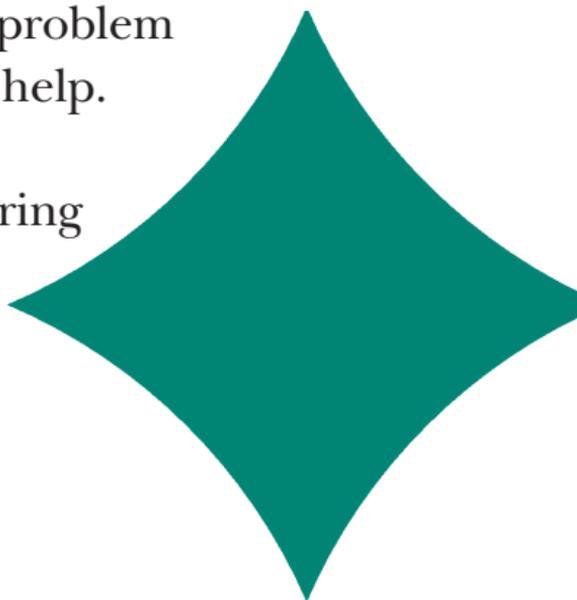
# AgePage

## Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can affect your life in many ways. It can range from missing certain sounds to total loss of hearing. Hearing loss can be serious. You may not hear the sound of your smoke detector alerting you to a fire. You may miss out on talks with friends or family.

Hearing problems can make you feel anxious, upset, and left out. It's easy to withdraw from people when you can't follow what is being said at the dinner table or in a restaurant. Friends and family may think you're confused, uncaring, or difficult when you're really having trouble hearing.

If you have a problem hearing, there is help. There are many treatments—hearing aids, certain medicines, or surgery.



## How Do I Know if I Have a Hearing Loss?

See your doctor if you:

- ◆ Have trouble hearing over the telephone
- ◆ Find it hard to follow conversations when two or more people are talking
- ◆ Often ask people to repeat what they are saying
- ◆ Need to turn up the TV volume so loud that others complain
- ◆ Have a problem hearing because of background noise
- ◆ Think that others seem to mumble
- ◆ Can't understand when women and children speak to you

## Types Of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can have many different causes. Here are two kinds of hearing loss common in older people.

**Presbycusis** (prez-bee-KYOO-sis) is a common type of hearing loss that comes on slowly as a person ages. It seems to run in families and affects hearing in both ears. The degree of hearing loss varies from person to person. A common sign of early hearing loss is not being able to hear a phone ringing.

**Tinnitus** (TIH-nih-tuhs or tih-NIE-tuhs) causes a ringing, roaring, or hissing noise in your ear. Tinnitus can go hand-in-hand with many types of hearing loss. It can also be a sign of other health problems, such as high blood pressure or allergies. Often it is unclear what causes tinnitus, which may be permanent, come and go, or go away quickly.

## Other Hearing Loss Problems

Loud noise is one of the most common causes of hearing loss. Noise from lawn mowers, snowblowers, motorcycles, firecrackers, or loud music can damage the inner ear. This can result in permanent hearing loss. You can prevent most noise-related hearing loss. Protect yourself by turning down the sound on your stereo, television, or headphones; move away from loud noise; or use earplugs or other ear protection.

Ear wax or fluid build-up can block sounds that are carried from the eardrum to the inner ear. If wax blockage is a problem, try using mild treatments, such as mineral oil, baby oil, glycerin, or commercial ear drops, to soften ear wax. A punctured eardrum can also cause hearing loss. The eardrum can be damaged by infection, pressure, or putting objects in the ear, including cotton-tipped

swabs. See your doctor if you have pain or fluid draining from the ear.

Viruses and bacteria, heart condition, stroke, brain injuries, or tumors may affect your hearing. If you have hearing problems caused by a new medication, check with your doctor to see if another medicine can be used.

Sudden deafness is a medical emergency that may be curable if treated in time. See a doctor right away.

## Talk To Your Doctor

Your family doctor may be able to diagnose and treat your hearing problem. Or, your doctor may refer you to other clinicians such as an otolaryngologist (oh-toh-layr-ehn-GOL-luh-jist), a doctor who specializes in medical problems of the ear, nose, and throat (also called

an ENT doctor), or an audiologist (aw-dee-AH-luh-jist), who is trained to measure hearing and provide services to improve hearing. Audiologists can help select the best hearing aid for you and teach you how to use it.

## What Devices Can Help?

There are many hearing devices that can help such as:

**Hearing aids.** Hearing aids are electronic, battery-run devices that make sounds louder. There are many types of hearing aids available. Before buying a hearing aid, check to find out if your insurance will cover the cost. Ask if you can have a trial period so that you can make sure the device is right for you. An audiologist will teach you how to use your hearing aid.

## Words To Know When Looking For Hearing Aids

- ◆ **Analog** hearing aids make certain sounds louder, and lower other sounds so that it's easier to follow conversations.
- ◆ **Digital** hearing aids give you some choice over what sounds are louder or softer. By controlling some background noise, you may hear conversations more easily.
- ◆ **Telecoil** refers to a magnetic coil in a hearing aid that helps you to hear when talking on the telephone or in buildings that have special sound systems.
- ◆ **Induction loop systems** can help you hear better in some public places such as auditoriums, movie theaters, churches, synagogues, and meeting places where microphones are used. Ask if the place you're visiting has one.

Hearing aids should fit comfortably in your ear. You may need several visits with the audiologist to get it right. Hearing aids may need repairs, and batteries will have to be changed on a regular basis. Remember, when you buy a hearing aid, you are buying both a product and a service.

**Assistive devices.** There are many products that can help you hear better. For example:

- ◆ Telephone amplifying devices can make it easier to use the phone.
- ◆ TV and radio listening systems can let you hear the TV or radio without being bothered by background noise or needing to turn up the volume.
- ◆ Alert systems can work with doorbells, smoke detectors, and alarm clocks to send you visual signals or vibrations. For example, a flashing light could let you know someone is at the door or the phone is ringing, or a vibrating alarm clock under your pillow could wake you in the morning.

**Cochlear implants.** These electronic devices are for people with severe hearing loss. Part of the device is surgically implanted under the skin. Another part is visible. You need special training to adjust to an implant. They don't work for all types of hearing loss.

## What Can I Do If I Have Trouble Hearing?

- ◆ Let people know that you have trouble hearing.
- ◆ Ask people to face you and to speak more slowly and clearly. Also, ask them to speak without shouting.
- ◆ Pay attention to what is being said and to facial expressions or gestures.
- ◆ Let the person talking know if you do not understand.
- ◆ Ask the person speaking to reword a sentence and try again.

## How Can I Help A Person With Hearing Loss?

Here are some tips you can use when talking with someone who has a hearing problem:

- ◆ Include people with hearing loss in the conversation.
- ◆ Find a quiet place to talk to help reduce background noise, especially in restaurants and social gatherings.
- ◆ Stand in good lighting and use facial expressions or gestures to give clues.
- ◆ Face the person and talk clearly.
- ◆ Speak a little more loudly than normal, but don't shout.

- ◆ Speak at a reasonable speed; do not hide your mouth, eat, or chew gum.
- ◆ Repeat yourself if necessary, using different words.
- ◆ Try to make sure only one person talks at a time.
- ◆ Be patient. Stay positive and relaxed.
- ◆ Ask how you can help.

Many people develop hearing problems as they grow older. Today, there are many ways to improve your hearing. Asking for professional help as soon as you notice a problem is the best way to handle the problem.

## For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:

### **American Academy of Audiology**

11730 Plaza America Drive, Suite 300  
Reston, VA 20190  
1-800-222-2336 (toll-free)  
*www.audiology.org*

### **American Academy of Otolaryngology— Head and Neck Surgery**

1650 Diagonal Road  
Alexandria, VA 22314-2857  
1-703-836-4444  
1-703-519-1585 (TTY)  
*www.entnet.org*

### **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

2200 Research Boulevard  
Rockville, MD 20850-3289  
1-800-638-8255 (toll-free)  
1-301-296-5650 (TTY)  
*www.asha.org*

### **American Tinnitus Association**

P.O. Box 5  
Portland, OR 97207-0005  
1-800-634-8978 (toll-free)  
*www.ata.org*

### **Hearing Loss Association of America**

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
1-301-657-2248  
1-301-657-2249 (TTY)  
*www.hearingloss.org*

### **National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**

NIDCD Information Clearinghouse  
1 Communication Avenue  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3456  
1-800-241-1044 (toll-free)  
1-800-241-1055 (TTY/toll-free)  
*www.nidcd.nih.gov*

### **National Library of Medicine**

Medline Plus  
*www.medlineplus.gov*

For more information on health and aging, contact:

**National Institute on Aging  
Information Center**

P.O. Box 8057

Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

1-800-222-2225

1-800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)

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Visit NIHSeniorHealth

(*www.nihseniorhealth.gov*), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.



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