

Hearing Loss

About one-third of Americans over age 60 have hearing problems. About half the people who are 85 and older have hearing loss.

Whether a hearing loss is small (missing certain sounds) or large (deafness), it is a serious concern. Hearing problems can get worse if they are not treated.

How Can Hearing Loss Affect Me?



Sometimes hearing problems can make you feel embarrassed, upset, and lonely. It is easy to withdraw when you can not follow a conversation at the dinner table or in a restaurant.

It is also easy for friends and family to think you are confused, uncaring, or difficult, when the problem may be that you just can not hear well.

Hearing loss does not have to keep you from enjoying life. Depending on the type and extent of your hearing loss, there are many treatment choices that may help.

How Do I Know If I Have Hearing Loss?

See your doctor if you:

- Have trouble hearing people talk over the telephone
- Find it hard to follow conversations when two or more people are talking
- Need to turn up the TV volume very loud
- Have a hearing problem because of background noise
- Sense that others seem to mumble
- Can not understand women or children when they speak to you

What Should I Do?

If you have trouble hearing, tell your doctor. Sometimes the diagnosis and treatment can take place in the doctor's office.

Your doctor may refer you to an otolaryngologist, a doctor who specializes in the ear, nose, and throat. This doctor will take a medical history, do a thorough exam, and suggest any needed tests.

You may also be referred to an audiologist, a health care professional who is trained to check your hearing using simple and painless tests.

What Is Available to Help Me Hear Better?



Other Assistive and Adaptive Devices

If you need hearing assistance, the audiologist may recommend a hearing aid. The audiologist can help you select the best type of hearing aid for your particular hearing problem, and help you learn to get the most from it.

A hearing aid is worn in or behind your ear. It can help some kinds of hearing loss by making sounds louder. However, it sometimes picks up background noises, traffic sounds, or other people talking that can affect how well you hear in certain situations.

The audiologist will teach you how to adjust the hearing aid for different situations. The audiologist can also help you determine whether your insurance will cover or help cover the costs of the hearing aid.

What Is Available to Help Me Hear Better?
continued

Other Assistive and Adaptive Devices, continued

- **Alerts.** Signals devices for doorbells, smoke detectors, and alarm clocks and other devices are available. Signals range from flashing lights to vibrating devices.
- **Cochlear implants.** In this surgery, doctors implant a small electronic device under the skin behind the ear. The device sends the message past the non-working part of the inner ear and on to the brain. This device may not be helpful for all types of hearing loss.

What Can I Do If I Have Problems Hearing?

If you have trouble hearing, you can help yourself, and the people you are talking to, by doing the following things:

- 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 people to reword a sentence and try again

Resources

Organizations

American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, Inc. (AAO-HNS)

One Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3357
Phone: (703) 836-4444
Web site: www.entnet.org

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

10801 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852
Phone: (800) 638-8255
Web site: www.asha.org

Resources, continued

Organizations, continued

American Tinnitus Association (ATA)

P.O. Box 5
Portland, OR 97207-0005
Phone: (800) 634-8978
Web site: www.ata.org

Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center

Gallaudet University
800 Florida Ave. NE
Washington, DC 20002-3695
Phone: (202) 651-5000 (voice and TTY)
Web site: <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)

31 Center Drive, MSC 2320
Bethesda, MD USA 20892-2320
Phone: (800) 241-1044
TTY: (800) 241-1055
Web site: www.nidcd.nih.gov

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc. (SHHH)

7910 Woodmont Ave, Suite 1200
Bethesda, MD 20814
Phone: (301) 657-2248
TTY: (301) 657-2249
Web site: www.shhh.org

Web Site

www.medlineplus.gov

Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, "Hearing Disorders and Deafness."