

Hearing loss - how it affects people

Recent research in South Australia indicates that up to 22 per cent of adults have a significant level of hearing loss. Many people with hearing loss experience a drop in self-esteem and confidence because of their impaired ability to communicate with other people.

Hearing loss refers to reduced hearing, which can be caused by a variety of factors. It is different from deafness, which is present from birth and may be caused by genetic factors or rubella infection during pregnancy.

Hearing loss can affect personal and work life

Hearing loss can affect a person in three main ways:

- Fewer educational and job opportunities due to impaired communication
- Social withdrawal due to reduced access to services and difficulties communicating with others
- Emotional problems caused by a drop in self-esteem and confidence.

There are two main types of hearing loss

'Conductive' hearing loss is caused by obstructions or malfunctions in the outer or middle ear. It can be caused by:

- Middle ear infections and malfunctions
- A damaged ear drum
- Impacted ear wax.

'Sensorineural' hearing loss is caused by damage to the hair cells in the inner ear. It can be caused by:

- Exposure to loud noise
- Diseases such as meningitis
- Ageing.

Other disorders of the ear

Other disorders of the ear include:

- **Tinnitus** – noises or ringing in the ears or head
- **Meniere's disease** – symptoms may include vertigo (dizziness), tinnitus, hearing loss and nausea
- **Acoustic neuroma** – tumours on the acoustic nerve.

Tips on speaking to a person with hearing loss

The following tips might be helpful next time you talk with a hearing impaired person:

- Get the person's attention.
- Face the person and stand close to them.
- Have the light on your face and don't cover your mouth.

- Speak more slowly than usual.
- Raise your voice if you have to, but try not to shout.
- Speak expressively and use face, hand and body movements.
- Be ready to use a pen and paper.

Where to get help

- Better Hearing Australia Tel. (03) 9510 1577 TTY (03) 9510 3499, Fax (03) 9510 6076, email: bhavic@betterhearing.org.au

Things to remember

- Hearing loss can be caused by physical problems, or by damage to the hair cells in the inner ear.
- Up to 22 per cent of adult Australians have a significant hearing loss.
- A person with hearing loss may lose confidence because they have difficulty communicating.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Better Health Channel

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.