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## Hearing loss - how it affects people

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### Summary

- Hearing loss can be caused by physical problems, including damage to the hair cells in the inner ear.
  - One in six Australians has some degree of hearing loss.
  - Hearing loss has impacts on mental health, social participation and work life.
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Research indicates that one in six Australians has some form 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. Having hearing loss can also limit one's ability to learn to speak a new language.

Hearing loss refers to reduced hearing, which can be caused by a variety of factors. It can either be congenital or acquired later on in life. It can range from mild hearing loss to profound hearing loss.

### 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:

- outer or 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:

- ageing
- exposure to loud noise, such as machinery or loud music
- diseases such as meningitis
- certain chemicals and medications, known as ototoxic medications.

### 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** – benign 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.
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- Face the person and stand close to them.
- Have the light on your face and do not 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.

#### Communication tips for someone with hearing loss

- Tell people about your hearing loss.
- Ask people to speak clearly.
- Encourage your communication partners to face you, speak up or speak more slowly.
- Advise people to gain your attention first and face you when talking with you.
- Ask questions about what you missed.
- Suggest rephrasing the information.

#### Where to get help

- **Better Hearing Australia**, Victorian Branch Tel. (03) 9510 1577 or 1300 BHA VIC (242 842), TTY (03) 9510 3499

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Australian Hearing

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