Hearing loss - how it affects people
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.

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.
- 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

References

• Listen hear! The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia, 2006, Access Economics, Australia. More information

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Ear nose and throat

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- Ear basics
- Ear conditions
- Hearing loss
- Nose conditions
- Throat conditions

Ear basics

- Ear problems in children
  Babies and young children are more likely to develop middle ear infections because they are still building up their immunity.

- Ears
  The brain uses the inner ear, the eyes and muscles to pinpoint the position of the body at all times.

- Ear wax
  In most cases, blockage of the ear canal with wax is a harmless event.

Ear conditions

- Acoustic neuroma
  In its earlier stages, an acoustic neuroma can present similar symptoms to other, less serious conditions, which may delay diagnosis and treatment.

- Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV)
  Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) is a condition characterised by episodes of sudden and severe vertigo.

- Dizziness and vertigo
  Dizziness is generally treatable and rarely indicates serious brain disease.

- Ear infections
  It is estimated that around four out of five children will experience a middle ear infection at least once.

- Ears - Meniere's disease
  Meniere's disease affects the ear, which is the centre of hearing and balance.

- Ears - otosclerosis
  Otosclerosis eventually affects both ears, but the condition doesn't cause total deafness.

- Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis
  Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis are disorders that result in inflammation of the inner ear and the nerve connecting the inner ear to the brain.

- Middle ear infections
  Middle ear infections often happen during or after a child has a cold.

- Swimmer's ear

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Swimmer's ear can be triggered by exposure to water or mechanical damage due to overzealous cleaning.

- **Tinnitus**
  
  Tinnitus cannot be cured, but it can be managed with some lifestyle changes.

### Hearing loss

- **Deafness - a range of causes**
  
  Deafness is caused by many different events including injury, disease and genetic defects.

- **Ears - ways to protect your hearing**
  
  Once hearing is damaged, it often can't be restored.

- **Hearing loss - auditory neuropathy**
  
  Auditory neuropathy is hearing loss caused by a disruption of nerve impulses travelling from the inner ear to the brain.

- **Hearing loss - communication in the workplace**
  
  If you are unsure how to best communicate with a colleague who has a hearing impairment, ask them.

- **Hearing loss - how it affects people**
  
  Many people with hearing loss experience a drop in self-esteem and confidence because of their impaired ability to communicate.

- **Hearing loss - lipreading**
  
  Lipreading can help people who are hearing impaired to cope better with their hearing loss.

- **Hearing problems - hyperacusis**
  
  Reduced sound tolerance can confine a person to their home, affect their career and social life, and make everyday activities impossible.

- **Hearing problems in children**
  
  The earlier that hearing loss is identified in children, the better for the child's language, learning and overall development.

- **Hearing tests**
  
  A ringing sensation in the ears (tinnitus), or people complaining that you talk too loudly are signs you may need to have your hearing checked.

### Nose conditions

- **Adenoids**
  
  Since adenoids are constantly in the path of germs, infections are common.

- **Anosmia - loss of smell**
  
  People are less sensitive to smells the older they get, and women tend to have a more acute sense of smell than men.

- **Nosebleeds**
  
  Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not severe or serious.

- **Polyps**
  
  Nasal polyps can sometimes interfere with breathing.

- **Sinusitis**
  
  If you suffer from sinusitis, it's important to see if there is any trigger which can be treated.

### Throat conditions

- **Croup**
  
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

- **Larynx**
  
  Prolonged exposure to air pollutants, such as dust, can irritate the larynx and cause chronic laryngitis.

- **Rheumatic fever**
  
  Rheumatic fever
Untreated rheumatic fever can lead to serious complications such as rheumatic heart disease...

- **Sleep apnoea**
  
  A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night...

- **Streptococcal infection - group A**
  
  Streptococcal infection - group A can cause sore throats (pharyngitis), scarlet fever or impetigo (school sores)...

- **Throat cancer**
  
  Risk factors for throat cancer include smoking and heavy alcohol consumption...

### Related Information

- **Ears - ways to protect your hearing**
  
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### Related information on other websites

- Better Hearing Australia.
- Deafness Forum of Australia.
- Victorian Council of Deaf People.

### Support Groups

- Better Hearing Australia

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