

How Do I Know If I Have a Hearing Problem?

Hearing loss is an invisible disability. It most often develops over several years, slowly affecting quality of life and creating communication problems with family, colleagues, and friends. Hearing loss may occur so gradually that you may not be aware that it is happening. Signs of hearing loss include the following:

- Asking people to repeat what they said
 - Ringing, buzzing, hissing, or roaring sounds in the ears
 - Misunderstanding conversations
 - Staying home to avoid social situations
 - Perceiving that people “mumble”
 - Undue fatigue and stress at the end of the day
 - Turning up the volume on the TV, radio, or personal listening device
 - Difficulty understanding speech in a noisy environment
 - Depending on another person to explain what a conversation is about
 - Difficulty understanding speech at public meetings or religious services
 - Children or teenagers, poor progress in school, poor attention, or behavioral problems
- If you experience one or more of these signs or feel that your hearing is not as good as it should be, it is time to seek the help of an audiologist.


Audiologists

Audiologists must obtain a doctorate of audiology (AuD) or other doctoral degree in the hearing and balance sciences. Audiologists must also be licensed or registered by the state in which they practice.

Audiologists are trained to:

- Evaluate and diagnose hearing loss and balance disorders;
- Prescribe, fit, verify, and validate hearing aids and other amplification and hearing assistance devices;
- Provide hearing rehabilitation training, such as auditory training and listening skills improvement;
- Assess and treat children and adults with auditory processing disorders;
- Assess and treat individuals with tinnitus (noise in the ear, such as ringing);
- Develop newborn hearing screening programs and hearing conservation programs;
- Perform ear- or hearing-related surgical monitoring; and
- Participate on cochlear implant teams.

Visit www.HowsYourHearing.org to “Find an Audiologist” in your local area.

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How's Your Hearing?

Ask an Audiologist!



Hearing loss affects over 36 million Americans and is the third most common health problem in the United States. Hearing loss is commonly associated with the normal aging process, but more than half of those with hearing loss are younger than 65 years old. Because people often do not realize they have a hearing problem, most wait 7 to 10 years before seeking a solution. The good news is, there is help.

American Academy of Audiology

How Do We Hear?

The ear is divided into three major sections:

- The outer ear collects and directs sound into the ear canal and to the eardrum.
- The middle ear passes sound through a vibrating eardrum and across the three smallest bones in the body.
- The inner ear processes sounds and speech, as well as motion information, for interpretation by the brain.

What Causes Hearing Loss?

There are a number of causes of hearing loss, all of which create difficulties in communication and daily social activities:

- The normal aging process
- Exposure to excessively loud noise
- Certain medications
- Genetics and family history
- Ear infections, trauma, or disease

How Is Hearing Evaluated?

The first step is to visit an audiologist, who can evaluate your hearing and determine the type and degree of your hearing loss. Audiologists are the primary health-care professionals who assess, diagnose, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children.

Having a complete hearing evaluation is a easy and quick testing procedure. Your audiologist will conduct a comprehensive diagnostic hearing assessment to determine the type and severity of your hearing problem. However, she will ask you questions about your medical and hearing history and will complete a visual examination of your eardrums and ear canals. Then you will sit in a specially built room with earphones placed in or over your ears. You will listen to a series of soft tones in each ear and indicate each time you hear the signal. Your audiologist will also evaluate your ability to understand words. Depending on the initial findings of the assessment, specialized equipment may be required to evaluate other aspects of your hearing system. At the completion of the assessment, your audiologist will thoroughly explain the results and help you understand your hearing ability.



How Is Hearing Loss Treated?

Based on the results of your assessment, the audiologist will make recommendations that may help alleviate your hearing problem. If your hearing problem needs medical or surgical treatment, your audiologist will refer you to a physician.

If a significant hearing loss is found that is not medically treatable, the audiologist will discuss various options to help you overcome your loss. Because nearly 90 percent of all hearing losses are permanent, the most common recommendation is hearing aids. If hearing aids are recommended, the audiologist will schedule a complete hearing aid assessment to determine which type, style, and model of hearing aids is most appropriate for your hearing loss and lifestyle. In addition to fitting and programming your hearing aids for your specific hearing loss, your audiologist can provide follow-up care, hearing aid accessories, and special training for you and your family members to maximize your use of hearing aids.

Audiologists are hearing experts, and the most advanced computerized techniques are used to ensure that the amplified sound is individualized to your listening needs. Audiologists are also experienced in counseling and rehabilitation for persons with hearing loss. Expert counseling—before and after you obtain hearing aids—is vital to your success in hearing.

The Council on Aging has reported that individuals with hearing loss may show reduced social interaction, depression, anxiety, emotional turmoil, insecurity, and general health problems. However, most people with hearing loss can be helped with hearing aids, and patients who use them report improved personal relationships, better self-esteem, and improved mental health. Hearing aids help millions of people to hear and communicate better, participate in life more fully, and enjoy an overall improved quality of life.

If you suspect that you may be experiencing hearing loss, ask an audiologist!

