

You And Your Hearing

Do you think you have a hearing loss? Often it is difficult to tell because hearing loss usually occurs gradually such that the person is not aware of it. Use the following indicators to see if you MAY have a hearing loss:

- ~ Do family members complain about your inability to hear?
- ~ Do you have difficulty understanding what people are saying in noisy places?
- ~ Do you often ask people to repeat themselves?
- ~ Do you find yourself avoiding social situations because you cannot hear?
- ~ Do you turn up the volume on the TV so loud that others are complaining?
- ~ Do you have difficulty determining which direction sounds are coming from?
- ~ Do you have a history of exposure to loud noise (loud concerts, guns, construction, etc.)?
- ~ Do you have difficulty hearing familiar sounds like the telephone and/or doorbell?

If you experience any or all of these problems on a consistent basis, you may have a hearing loss. You are not alone. 10% of the Canadian population suffer from some level of hearing loss; as many as half of these people are under the age of 65.

You may not notice hearing loss in yourself, but others around you will.

Hearing Loss - What is it?

Hearing loss typically produces a decrease in the perception and understanding of sound, particularly under challenging listening conditions such as background noise. The perception of both simple and complex sounds (e.g. speech and music) is usually affected. Hearing loss may be associated with different types of health problems, but the end effect is one of 2 basic types of hearing loss:

Conductive Hearing Loss - occurs when sound is not conducted efficiently through the ear canal, ear drum or middle ear. Some of the important causes of conductive hearing loss include:

- ~ Obstruction of the ear canal by ear wax or a foreign object
- ~ Perforation or other damage to the ear drum
- ~ Acute or chronic middle ear infections
- ~ Injury/diseases affecting the small bones inside the middle ear

Conductive hearing loss is often reversible with medical or surgical treatment. If surgery is not recommended then hearing aids are usually appropriate.

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Sensorineural Hearing Loss - occurs when there is damage to the inner ear (cochlea) or hearing nerve in the brain. Some of the important causes of sensorineural hearing loss are:

- ~ Hearing loss caused by excessive exposure to loud noise
- ~ Viral or bacterial infections
- ~ Medications such as aminoglycoside antibiotics (gentamycin, streptomycin, erythromycin and vancomycin), ASA, and certain drugs given for the treatment of cancer (cisplatinum)
- ~ Meniere's Disease - an inner ear disorder which produces fluctuating hearing loss, periods/attacks of vertigo, full feeling in the ears and tinnitus (subjective sounds in the ears)
- ~ Aging - gradual age-related hearing loss called presbycusis and affects 30% of persons over the age of 65.
- ~ Acoustic Neuroma (also called vestibular schwannoma) - is a tumor which is located between the ear and the brain and which usually affects balance as well as hearing. Acoustic neuroma's affect about 1 in every 100,000 Canadians. In 95% of cases the tumor affects only 1 ear and in 5% of cases the problem is linked to an inherited syndrome called neurofibromatosis Type 2.

Sensorineural hearing loss is typically a permanent type of hearing loss that usually can be helped with a hearing aid or other type of assistive listening device.

A **Mixed Hearing Loss** occurs when someone has a combination of a conductive hearing loss and a sensorineural hearing loss.

I Have a Hearing Loss - What Can I Do?

If you suspect that you may have a hearing loss see your family doctor who can refer you to a qualified audiologist to have your hearing evaluated. In some provinces in Canada you can refer yourself directly to an audiologist without a doctor's referral.

An audiologist is a health care professional trained to evaluate, diagnose, and rehabilitate those with hearing loss. They have an advanced university education (Master's or Doctorate) in Audiology and most are national members with either the Canadian Academy of Audiology or the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists or both.

They will provide the full range of tests necessary to determine the exact nature of your hearing loss and whether your condition warrants medical attention. No one is too young to have a hearing test, even a newborn. Many audiologists are also qualified to inform you about hearing aids.

They can select, fit and even dispense hearing aids and other assistive listening devices such as FM systems and infrared systems. As well they provide patient and family counseling about living with a hearing loss and hearing conservation programs to prevent hearing loss.

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Communicating With Someone With A Hearing Loss

People who have a hearing loss can feel very isolated and lonely. Listening becomes difficult and getting together with family and friends can become very frustrating. Here are some ways you can make communicating with someone with a hearing loss easier and more effective:

- ~ Speak normally, not too exaggerated, too quickly or too loudly
- ~ Be sure you have the persons attention before you begin speaking to them
- ~ Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking so they can take advantage of speech reading (lip reading) cues
- ~ Use facial expressions, gestures and body language to make it easier for the hard-of-hearing person to understand what you are saying
- ~ Be aware of competing noises or sounds in the room such as music, other people talking, or mechanical sounds such as air conditioners. Background noises make it much more difficult to hear
- ~ Reword your sentence if the hard-of-hearing person does not understand what you are saying
- ~ Most importantly ask if there is anything you can do to improve communication

