

Hearing Loss

What is hearing loss?

Hearing loss is a reduced ability to detect sounds. Many people try to describe hearing loss as a percentage. This is not the most accurate way to describe it. It is better to describe it by the type and the degree of hearing loss.

Hearing loss can happen when any part of the ear or auditory (hearing) system is not working in the usual way.

What caused my child's hearing loss?

Over 50% of infants born with hearing loss have no known risk factors for hearing loss. Do Not Blame Yourself! The cause of your child's hearing loss may never be known.

Some of the risk factors for hearing loss are:

- Family history of hearing loss.
- A syndrome that is known to have hearing loss.
- Craniofacial abnormalities, such as a cleft lip, palate, ear pits, or ear tags.
- Certain infections in the mother during pregnancy such as CMV (cytomegalovirus), toxoplasmosis, herpes, and rubella.
- Complications during birth such as prematurity or lack of oxygen.
- Admission to a neonatal intensive care unit for more than 5 days.
- Certain infections such as bacterial meningitis, mumps, measles or whooping cough.
- Recurrent ear infections.
- Very loud noise such as fireworks, loud music, or gun fire.
- Trauma, such as head injury.

These are some of the most common risk factors of hearing loss. Your audiologist or doctor can give you more information about other risk factors and causes of hearing loss.

Types of hearing loss

- **Conductive Hearing Loss**- Hearing loss caused by something that blocks sounds from getting through the outer or middle ear and being "conducted" to the inner ear. Some causes of conductive hearing loss include impacted wax, perforation (hole) in the eardrum, or middle ear fluid and/or infection. This type of hearing loss can sometimes be treated with medicine or surgery.
- **Conductive Permanent Hearing Loss**- Hearing loss caused by malformation of outer ear, ear canal, or middle ear structures. This type of hearing loss can sometimes be corrected with surgery at appropriate developmental ages.
- **Sensorineural Hearing Loss**- Hearing loss that occurs when there is a problem in the way the inner ear or hearing nerve works. Some causes of sensorineural hearing loss are hair cell damage or malformation of the cochlea. Sensorineural losses are generally perceived as a loss of clarity of sound, but not necessarily a decrease in loudness, and are more likely to be permanent.

- **Mixed Hearing Loss**- Hearing loss that includes both a conductive and a sensorineural hearing loss. An example of a mixed hearing loss is a child with permanent sensorineural loss and a temporary conductive loss due to middle ear fluid.
- **Auditory Neuropathy Spectrum Disorder** - Hearing loss that occurs when sound travels through the ear normally up to the cochlea, but doesn't reach the brain as an understandable input.

Hearing loss can also be described as:

- **Unilateral or Bilateral**- Hearing loss is in one ear (unilateral) or both ears (bilateral).
- **Pre-lingual or Post-lingual**- Hearing loss happened before a person learned to talk (pre-lingual) or after a person learned to talk (post-lingual)
- **Symmetrical or Asymmetrical**- Hearing loss is the same in both ears (symmetrical) or is different in each ear (asymmetrical).
- **Progressive or Sudden**- Hearing loss worsens over time (progressive) or happens quickly (sudden).
- **Fluctuating or Stable**- Hearing loss gets either better or worse over time (fluctuating) or stays the same over time (stable).
- **Congenital or Acquired/Delayed Onset**- Hearing loss is present at birth (congenital) or appears sometime later in life (acquired or delayed onset).

Terms used to describe people with hearing loss:

- **hearing impaired** is used for a child with any degree of hearing loss. (Many people don't like this term and prefer to use the term *hard of hearing*.)
- **hard of hearing** is used if a child has a mild to severe degree of hearing loss.
- **deaf**, when spelled with a little or lower case **d**, means "audiologically deaf." This term is used to describe a profound or severe to profound degree of hearing loss.
- **Deaf**, spelled with a capital or upper case **D**, is used by the Deaf Community to mean "culturally Deaf." A person can have *any* degree of hearing loss to be a member of the Deaf Community. Members of the Deaf Community communicate using sign language, and have a culture that they identify as their own.