



Hearing loss

People over age 50 are likely to lose some hearing each year. The decline is usually gradual.

Hearing problems can get worse if they are ignored and not treated. People with hearing problems may withdraw from others because they may not be able to understand what others say. Hearing loss can cause an older person to be labeled “confused” or having dementia.

DECIBELS (dB) OF SOUND

Sound levels are measured in decibels (dB). In general, the louder the sound, the higher the dB.

Type of Sound	dB
Weakest sound heard	0
Whisper	30
Normal talking	60–70
Average TV	75
Busy street	80

Repeated Exposures > 85 can lead to hearing loss

Hair dryer	90
Lawnmower	90
Subway train	95
Music concert	110–120
Chain saw	120

Ear pain begins at 125 dB

Jet take-off	135
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One time exposure >140 dB can cause permanent hearing loss

Siren (at 100 feet)	140
Firearms	140–170
Loudest the ear can hear	197

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Words are hard to understand. This worsens when there is background noise.
- Certain sounds are overly loud or annoying.
- Hearing a hissing or ringing background noise. This can be constant or it can come and go.
- Concerts, TV shows, etc. are less enjoyable because much goes unheard.



CAUSES

- Presbycusis. This is a gradual type of hearing loss. It is common with aging. With this, you can have a hard time understanding speech. You may not tolerate loud sounds. You may not hear high pitched sounds. Hearing loss from presbycusis does not cause deafness.
- Ear wax that blocks the ear canal.
- A chronic middle ear infection or an infection of the inner ear.
- Medicines (e.g., aspirin).
- Blood vessel disorders, such as high blood pressure.
- Acoustic trauma, such as from a blow to the ear or from excessive noise. Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) can be from a one-time exposure to an extremely loud sound or to repeated exposure to loud level sounds.
- Ménière’s disease. This is a problem of the inner ear. The hearing loss comes and goes. Dizziness is also a symptom.
- Small tumors on the auditory nerve. Brain tumor (rarely).



TREATMENT

- Earwax is removed by a health care provider.
- Hearing aid(s). These make sounds louder.
- Speech reading. This is learning to read lips and facial expressions.
- Auditory training. This helps with specific hearing problems.
- Surgery. This can be done if the problem requires it.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



When your child is awake, do they not respond to any sound, even a whistle or a loud clap?

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



With hearing loss, do any of these problems occur?

- A discharge from the ear
- Ear pain doesn't go away
- Feel dizzy or it feels like things are spinning around you
- A recent ear or respiratory infection
- It feels like your ears are blocked

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Is a nondigital watch not heard when held next to the ear?

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do you hear a ringing sound in one or both ears all of the time?

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Did you lose your hearing after exposure to loud noises, (e.g., rock concerts, power tools, firearms, etc.) and has this not improved?

NO
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YES ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

Age-Related Hearing Loss

- Ask people to speak clearly and in a normal tone.
- Look at people when they are talking. Watch expressions.
- Try to limit background noise when speaking.
- In a church or theater, sit in the 3rd or 4th row with people sitting around you.
- Install a flasher or amplifier on your phone, door chime, and alarm clock.

Hear Sounds Better

- Use a hearing aid. Examples are ones worn:
 - In-the-Ear (ITE).
 - Behind-the-Ear (BTE).
 - In-the-Canal (ITC).
- See an audiologist. Ask them about a trial period with different hearing aids to find one you are comfortable with.
- Use devices and listening systems that help you hear better when you use your phone, TV, etc.

Clear Earwax

Use only if the eardrum is not ruptured or if you don't have an ear infection. Check with your doctor if you are not sure.

- Lie on your side. Using a syringe or medicine dropper, carefully squeeze a few drops of lukewarm water into your ear (or have someone else do this). Let the water remain there for 10 to 15 minutes and then shake it out. Now, squeeze a few drops of hydrogen peroxide, mineral oil, or an over-the-counter cleaner, such as Debrox, into the ear. Let the excess fluid flow out of the ear.
- After several minutes, put warm water in the ear again. Let it stay there for 10 to 15 minutes. Tilt the head to allow it to drain out of the ear.

Repeat this entire procedure again in 3 hours if the earwax has not cleared. If there is still earwax and you still feel a full-like sensation, see your doctor to have them remove it.