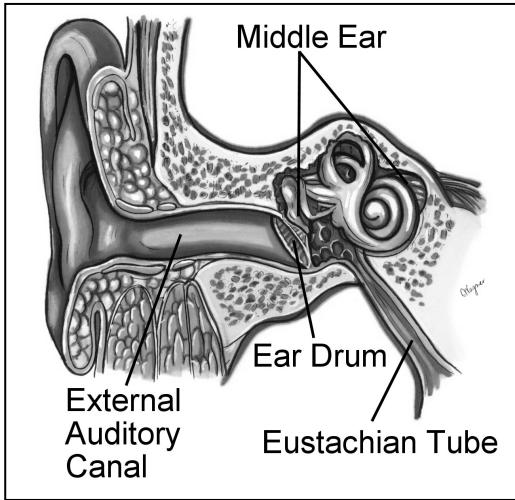


Sensorineural hearing loss



Hearing nerve (sensorineural) hearing loss is commonly caused by a combination of age related change (presbycusis) and cumulative noise exposure. Age related change affects nearly one third of the elderly. Age related change is affected by your heredity (family) and generally starts around middle age, affecting the higher frequencies. Permanent noise damage occurs with 8 hours of exposure to more than 90dB of noise (a lawnmower or tractor normally operates at 90dB). Less time is required for damage at higher volumes (eg 30 mins at 110dB which is the level of a chainsaw). Generally, ringing in the ears (tinnitus) after noise exposure indicates that permanent damage has been done. A hearing test (audiogram) will confirm your level of hearing loss.

Whatever the cause, you may notice that you find difficulty understanding people or the TV especially when there is background noise. The changes causing this take place in the *cochlea*, a cavity in the inner ear. This contains many tiny hairs which convert sound vibrations into electrical impulses which are interpreted by your brain. The hairs die due to normal aging or noise damage and cannot be surgically regenerated. However you can take steps to improve what you hear.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

- Protect your ears from noise damage. Use ear plugs (ideally custom moulded available from an audiologist) and earmuffs (better sound protection).
- Position yourself to hear: face the person speaking to you.
- Turn off background noise: turn off the TV and choose quiet settings.
- Ask others to speak clearly or repeat themselves if necessary.
- Watch for clues: watch the speakers lips, face and hands.

HEARING AIDS

- Hearing aids can be very helpful with this problem. Ideally, obtain a hearing aid from a local audiologist that you can visit easily if you have problems with the aid. Australian hearing can provide a cost free hearing aid to pensioners. Better hearing Victoria (www.betterhearing.org.au) has some reconditioned aids for low income individuals.
- Assistive listening devices can link your hearing aid into the TV or telephone to help you.
- Do not wear hearing aids in the shower or while swimming.
- Keep hearing aid dry, clean, and away from chemicals, including hair care products.
- Cochlear implants may be considered for individuals whose hearing impairment is severe (eg cannot use the telephone despite a well fitted hearing aid).



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