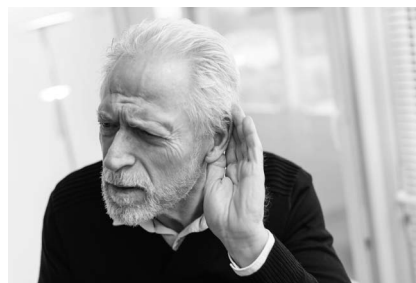


# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEARING LOSS

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Is Hearing Loss?

Hearing loss happens when there are changes within the ears or problems with the nerves that carry sound to the brain. It can happen at any age but is most common among older adults. Although hearing loss is common, it is not considered normal. It is important to detect and treat it early. Undiagnosed hearing loss may lead to depression, anxiety, and declines in mental function.



## What Causes It?

Risk factors in adults include:

- Age
- Exposure to loud noises
- Family history of hearing loss
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Taking certain medicines

Although rare, certain infections or injuries can cause sudden hearing loss and a feeling of fullness in your ear. If this happens, you should see a doctor right away.

## What Are Some Symptoms?

Signs of hearing loss can include:

- Difficulty understanding others in loud environments
- Feeling like others are mumbling
- Trouble differentiating between words and sounds
- Frequently turning up the television volume

Hearing loss can happen gradually. A family member may notice it before you do if, for example, they see you withdrawing from relationships and hobbies.

## How Can I Prevent It?

- Limit exposure to loud noises, both at work and in your free time.
- Use hearing protection if you will be around loud noises.
- Avoid or closely monitor your use of certain medicines and exposure to chemicals.
- Take precautions to avoid head injury.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will do a physical examination. This will include looking in your ears for infection, wax buildup, or other blockages.
- Your doctor will take a medical history and ask when you first noticed your hearing loss. They will also ask about any medicines you take.

- Your doctor can do simple tests in the office to detect hearing loss. These include whispering close to your ear or rubbing their fingers together by your ear and asking you about what you heard. They might also use a handheld device called an audiometer or a mobile or tablet-based app.
- Once your doctor determines you have hearing loss, they will refer you to an audiologist, who can perform additional tests to see how much hearing you have lost and identify ways to help you hear better.

## How Is It Treated?

- If your doctor notices wax buildup (which is normal but can cause hearing loss), they will remove it.
- Sudden hearing loss may be treated with steroids, either by mouth or by an injection in the ear.
- Hearing aids, which make outside noises louder, are most commonly used to manage hearing loss. Many different kinds are available. Over-the-counter hearing aids are expected to be available in 2021.
- Handheld devices, called assistive listening devices, are simple and inexpensive ways to help you hear better.
- Cochlear implants are sometimes recommended. They are small devices that are implanted surgically and send sound directly to the nerves in your ear.

## Questions for My Doctor

- What can I do to prevent hearing loss?
- Should I be screened for hearing loss?
- Should I see a specialist?
- What type of hearing aids will work for me? Will insurance cover them?
- How can my family best communicate with me?

## For More Information



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**American Geriatrics Society's Health in Aging Foundation**

[www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/hearing-loss](http://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/hearing-loss)

**Hearing Loss Association of America**

[www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/hearing-aids](http://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/hearing-aids)

**MedlinePlus**

<https://medlineplus.gov/hearingdisordersanddeafness.html>