



Do You Suspect You Have a Hearing Loss?

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

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Thirty million Americans have a hearing loss significant enough to cause problems in their daily lives. Hearing loss is our most common chronic health problem, yet it is one of the least understood.

Why Wait for Help?

Studies show that people who suspect they have a hearing loss often wait five or more years before they consult with their doctor or seek other help. Our experiences at the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (NVRC) confirm this.

Hearing loss often happens so gradually you may not realize how much hearing has been lost until a friend, co-worker, or family member complains about communication problems. You may think that other people are not speaking clearly or loudly enough.

Waiting so long to get help is unfortunate because there are options. Many middle ear problems can be corrected with surgery or medication. If you have sensorineural hearing loss, hearing aids can help you to communicate better. Once you are aware of the problem, much can be done to make life easier, both for you and the people with whom you live, work, and play. Delay only makes it harder later on when you have to adjust and re-acclimate to the sounds you have been missing.

Hearing Loss is Common

Hearing loss is found in people of all ages. It is not a sign of incompetence or age. Virtually all adults now have some hearing loss by the age of 30, and the incidence of hearing loss increases with age.

We live in a noisy world that harms our hearing. Research continues to connect hearing loss to many factors – certain drugs, diabetes, alcohol, smoking, and cardiovascular disease, to name just a few.

Warning Signs for Hearing Loss

- Hearing sounds but not understanding them; voices are heard but words are not understood.
- Often needing to ask people to repeat what they say.
- Turning the TV or radio louder than other people find comfortable.
- Dizziness or pain in the ears.
- Ringing, buzzing or other sounds in the ears.
- Difficulty hearing at the theater, restaurant, mall or other noisy situations.
- Social withdrawal.
- Difficulty hearing speech if the speaker's face is not visible.

What to Do

1. Talk to your family doctor. A physical checkup can show if other factors contribute to your hearing loss. Your doctor should check all your medications to see if any are ototoxic and may cause hearing damage.
2. Consult a medical specialist to see if you can be helped by surgery or medication. Otolaryngologists treat the ear, nose and throat (ENT); otologists specialize only in ear problems. Get a referral from your doctor, HMO, local hospital or medical society, or speech and hearing center.

Kinds of Hearing Loss

The specialist will explain if you have hearing loss, and tell you what type of loss it is:

- Conductive: Sound is blocked by an obstruction in the external or middle ear such as wax, fluid, infection, or the tiny bones in the middle ear not moving properly. Surgery or medication often corrects these problems, and a hearing aid may also help.
- Sensorineural (nerve damage): Nerve cells or fibers in the inner ear are damaged and no longer transmit sound properly. It may be hard to understand words or speech sounds. Usually there is no medical way to correct this, but hearing aids and assistive devices often help.
- Mixed: A combination of both conductive and sensorineural hearing loss.

See an Audiologist

Get a complete hearing evaluation from a Certified Clinical Audiologist with a Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A) issued by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). This painless evaluation will show how well you hear and if you can be helped by a hearing aid. It will show what type of hearing aid is best for you and give the specifications for the aid.

What Your Audiologist Will Tell You

1. What tests were performed and what the results indicate.
2. The amount of hearing loss in each ear.
3. How well you understand speech in each ear.
4. How your hearing loss affects your ability to communicate.
5. His or her recommendations.

Need More Information?

Contact NVRC for a wide range of resources. See the front page for our contact information.