

“About one-third of Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have hearing problems. About half the people who are 85 and older have hearing loss. Whether a hearing loss is small (missing certain sounds) or large (being profoundly deaf), it is a serious concern. If left untreated, problems can get worse”

(<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/noise.aspx> National Institute on Deafness and other Communications Disorders). Hearing loss affects a person’s life in many ways, such as missing out on conversations or telephone calls with friends, family, or health care providers’ information. Hearing problems make people feel embarrassed, upset, and lonely. It can cause a person to withdraw from conversation at dinner tables or social settings.

Questions to help determine if one’s hearing needs to be evaluated by a hearing professional:

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|---|----------------|
| Problem hearing over the telephone? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Trouble following conversation when two are talking at the same time? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| People complain that you turn the TV volume up too high? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Do you have to strain to understand conversation? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Have trouble hearing in a noisy background? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Do many people you talk to seem to mumble (or not speak clearly)? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Trouble understanding the speech of women and children? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| People get annoyed because you misunderstand what they say? | Yes ___ No ___ |

If “yes” is answered to three or more of above questions, it is recommended one see an [otolaryngologist](#), M.D. (an ear, nose, and throat specialist) or a doctor of [audiology](#) (Ph.D.) for a [hearing](#) evaluation.

Different Types of Hearing Loss. “**Presbycusis** (prez-bee-KYOO-sis) is age-related hearing loss. It becomes more common in people as they get older. People with this kind of hearing loss may have a hard time hearing what others are saying or may be unable to stand loud sounds. The decline is slow. Just as hair turns gray at different rates, presbycusis can develop at different rates. It can be caused by **sensorineural** (sen-soh-ree-NOO-ruhl) hearing loss. This type of hearing loss results from damage to parts of the inner ear, the auditory nerve, or hearing pathways in the brain. Presbycusis may be caused by aging, loud noise, heredity, head injury, infection, illness, certain prescription drugs, and circulation problems such as high blood pressure. The degree of hearing loss varies from person to person. Also, a person can have a different amount of hearing loss in each ear” (<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20432>). First to be affected are high tones (includes most common sounds in spoken English – p, s, f, t, d, sh, ch, h. For example, “Can you un er an l e e e wi ou e igh one?” (Can you understand this sentence without the high tones?) Typically next are mid tones -- tongue and base of throat (ka, la, rr).

What Causes Hearing Loss? Hearing loss can have many different causes, including the aging process, ear wax buildup, exposure to very loud noises over a long period of time, viral or bacterial infections, heart conditions or stroke, head injuries, tumors, certain medicines, and heredity.

How You Can Help a Person with Hearing Loss. Consider using the following tips:

- Face the person and talk clearly.
- Speak at a reasonable speed; do not hide your mouth, eat, or chew gum.
- Stand in good lighting and reduce background noises.
- Use facial expressions or gestures to give useful clues.
- Repeat yourself if necessary, using different words.
- Include the hearing-impaired person when talking. Talk with the person, not about the person, when you are with others. This helps keep the hearing-impaired person from feeling alone and excluded.
- Be patient; stay positive and relaxed. Ask how you can help.

When is noise too loud? You have to raise your voice to be understood by someone standing nearby. Your ears hurt from the noise. A buzzing or ringing sound occurs in your ears, even temporarily. It takes several hours away from the noise to hear as well as you do normally. Block noise (wear earplugs, ear muffs, ear protective devices), avoid the noise (walk away), or turn down the sound.

Intensity of Common Sound

<u>Source of noise</u>	<u>Sound level in dB</u>		
Firearms	140 to 170	Jet engines	140
Rock concerts	90 to 130	Amplified car stereos	140 at full volume
Portable stereos	115 at full volume	Powers mowers	105
Jackhammers	100	Subway trains	100
Video arcades	100	Freeway driving in conv.	95
Power saws	95	Motorcycles at 25 ft	90
Food blender	88	Electric razors	85
Garbage disposal	80	Clothes washer	78
Dishwasher	75		

Sites that compare sound levels: <http://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov>
http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/education/teachers/Pages/common_sounds.aspx
<http://www.noisehelp.com/noise-level-chart.html> <http://www.soundbytes.com/page/SB/CTGY/decibel-levels>
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/sound-ruler.aspx> (sound video).

How does a cochlear implant work? “A cochlear implant is very different from a hearing aid. Hearing aids amplify sounds so they may be detected by damaged ears. Cochlear implants bypass damaged portions of the ear and directly stimulate the auditory nerve. Signals generated by the implant are sent by way of the auditory nerve to the brain, which recognizes the signals as sound. Hearing through a cochlear implant is different from normal hearing and takes time to learn or relearn. However, it allows many people to recognize warning signals, understand other sounds in the environment, and enjoy a conversation in person or by telephone.
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/coch.aspx>. To see a diagram of the cochlear implant go to <http://www.science.org.au/nova/029/029box01.htm>

Information about treatments including hearing aids, assistive and adaptive devices, and cochlear implants is found at <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20432&page=2>

Be a wise consumer and question “too good to be true” advertisements for hearing aids that cure your hearing loss! Check the credentials of the hearing provider.