

Centre for Hearing and Balance Disorders

Losing your hearing suddenly

What is sudden hearing loss?

A sudden hearing loss can be a:

- **Conductive hearing loss** where there is a problem in the middle part of the ear usually due to a build of mucus behind the eardrum or a problem with the three small bones that help transfer sound to the inner ear
- **Sensorineural hearing loss** where there is a problem with the inner ear known as the cochlea or the hearing nerve and associated nerve pathways.

A sudden hearing loss may affect one or both ears. A sudden hearing loss may come on either instantaneously or over a few days or weeks. Your hearing may recover, but it may not and you may be left with a permanent hearing loss. Recovery will depend on the cause and severity of the problem.

How do I come to terms with a hearing loss?

Losing your hearing suddenly can be a psychologically traumatic experience, particularly if the loss is severe and if you also have tinnitus or balance problems.

Hearing loss can leave you with a very different experience of the world that can be bewildering and frightening.

There are some causes of sudden hearing loss where the loss can be temporary. However, if it is not, you will need time to come to terms with the changes and will also benefit from help from professionals, friends,



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family, work colleagues and perhaps groups of people who have gone through a similar experience.

How you feel about your hearing loss will change over time. If it is due to a sudden and temporary acute illness or injury it may be a while before you feel the full impact of the loss.

Some common feelings about losing your hearing permanently

When you first lose your hearing you might find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that the loss is permanent. This is a normal reaction to a sudden loss of any kind. You might find yourself thinking that it is impossible for your hearing to disappear as quickly as it has done and you may believe that it will come back. You might also think that medical science will be able to restore your hearing and find it difficult to accept that doctors can give you only a limited amount of help.

You might feel very angry towards yourself, doctors, or others who you may feel have somehow caused your hearing loss. You may also feel very isolated because other people cannot see your deafness, tinnitus or balance problem and may seem to be ignoring it. They may even think you do not have a problem or misunderstand it.

What you and others can do to help

You might find that when you tell people you are deafened, they may seem awkward and embarrassed. However, if you are not open with people you may be left feeling even more isolated. You will be helping yourself and others if you describe your hearing loss to them and explain what you need them to do. Don't feel embarrassed if you don't hear someone properly. Remember, you do not need to keep apologising for your deafness. It is up to everyone in a conversation to communicate clearly.

With the right sort of professional support, and with time, you should find that you become more skilled at being aware of your environment, communicating and helping others to communicate well with you. As your skills grow you will feel more in control and more like your old self. You will probably find that you are able to adapt the way you do things so that you can continue to enjoy your leisure interests and social life.

Involving your family and friends

If your partner, relative or a close friend can go with you on your visits to your ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) specialist or audiologist, they can learn about ways in which they can make communication easier for you. If your family and close friends don't ask you about your deafness and treat you as they did before you lost your hearing it does not mean they don't care. It is very common for people to react in this way. They may be bewildered by your deafness and think that the best way to help you is to treat you as if nothing has changed.

What else can help?

- **Hearing aids**

If your hearing loss does not improve you may be offered hearing aids. National Health Service (NHS) hearing aids are free of charge and include batteries and any necessary repairs. You can also buy hearing aids privately.

- **Equipment**

You can get a range of equipment to help you in your home, in the car, at work and when you are out socialising. For example, if you have difficulty hearing an alarm clock, telephone or doorbell ringing, you can get equipment that has been designed or adapted for deaf and hard of hearing people. Amplified telephones are also available or you may wish to try a text phone. You can also get equipment to help you listen to conversations, meetings or the television.

- **Lipreading classes**

You may find that you will benefit from joining a lip-reading class. Qualified lip-reading teachers will demonstrate the different shapes that sounds make on the lips so that you can identify them. They also explain how to fill in the gaps of speech that you can't hear, and how to use clues from the context of the conversation. Going to a lip-reading class can boost your confidence and give you the chance to talk to other people who also have a hearing loss.

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If you have any queries or concerns contact: Ann-Marie Hawkins, or Bernadette Parker on 024 7696 6444

Further information from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID, formerly Action on Hearing Loss)

The Information Line offers a wide range of information on many aspects of deafness and hearing loss. You can contact us for printed copies of this fact sheet and the full range of information fact sheets and leaflets

Telephone: 0808 808 0123

SMS: 0808 808 0360

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Fax: 020 7296 8199

Email: informationline@hearingloss.org.uk

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6444 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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