

# Deafness



Hearing less well can make it difficult to communicate with those around you. This fact sheet tells you about deafness, its signs, and the role an audiologist can play in making your daily life easier.

## What is deafness?

It is a partial or total loss of the ability to hear. As such, degrees of deafness can range from very mild to profound.

It may occur suddenly or develop gradually over time.

## What are the signs?

Hearing loss may not be noticeable right away. Often, it settles in little by little. Here are some common signs:

- asking people to repeat themselves
- having trouble following conversations
- having to raise the volume on the radio or television

Hearing loss can have different impacts depending on the situation. For example, you will be more aware of it in groups and noisy places. Family and friends are often the first to notice.

## Why am I going deaf?

Deafness can have different causes, depending on when it occurs. Here are some examples:

### Deafness that occurs at birth, or “congenital” deafness

- Genetic transmission from parent to child
- A problem during pregnancy or childbirth

### Deafness that develops during one’s lifetime, or “acquired” deafness

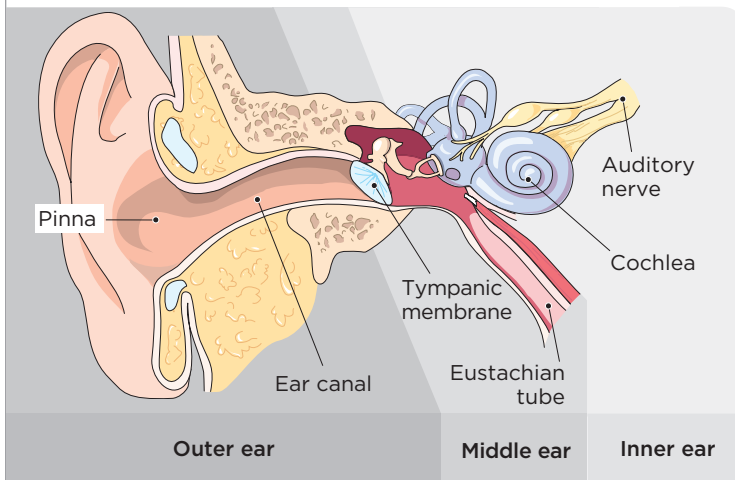
- An ear problem (chronic infection, fluid, injury, etc.)
- Exposure to very loud noises
- The aging process
- Taking certain medications
- Certain health problems, such as diabetes



**The auditory (hearing) system would have been affected in either of these ways:**

- a malfunction or injury to the outer, middle, and/or inner ear
- damage to the central auditory system (in the brain)

**The ear**



## What are the possible effects of deafness?

Most of the time, it creates communication problems with those around you.

### Family

The person with hearing loss often complains that other people talk too softly or too fast, or mumble. In turn, those people complain that the person with impaired hearing often asks them to repeat themselves, or that they “only hear what they want to hear”.



Undetected deafness for which nothing is done can also make the person more irritable and less patient. The risk of depression is higher.

Often, people with hearing loss tend to isolate themselves. They avoid interactions, stay out of conversations, and take part in fewer social activities. The family may suffer, especially if the deafness problem is not known and its impacts are poorly understood.

### Work

Hearing loss can have a direct impact on certain tasks. Oral instructions can be difficult to understand. People with hearing loss may lose their self-confidence, and may become anxious and feel they are no longer competent.

Communication problems are mostly noticed in meetings, on the phone, and in noisy places. These situations require more effort.

Everyone reacts differently to hearing loss. For the person afflicted and their family and friends, it is important to pay attention to the development of problems in hearing and communications. Give yourself the time it takes to accept the situation and to adapt. Without outside help, this journey is more difficult.

## What should I do if I think I have hearing loss?

Ask to meet with an audiologist. This is the specialist in hearing problems.

The audiologist will have you do different tests. This is called an “audiological evaluation”. Among other things, these tests will measure how you hear pure sounds and how well you understand speech. This evaluation usually takes about 1 hour.

## How can an audiologist help me?

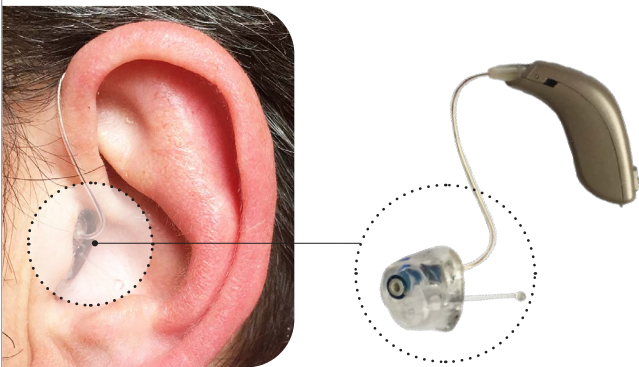
The audiologist will make recommendations based on the results of your audiological evaluation. These will be adapted as much as possible to your needs, that is, to your activities, your type of work, etc. You will be able to discuss them with the audiologist and then choose the options that are most suitable for you.

The audiologist's suggestions might include:

> **Strategies to help your communications, such as:**

- Look at the face of the person talking to you
- Make sure there is good lighting so you can see the person's face clearly
- Stay close to the person
- Reduce the surrounding noise level
- If necessary, don't hesitate to ask the person to repeat or to speak more slowly.

> **A hearing aid.** It can help you hear better in various environments. Hearing aids can be adjusted very precisely and adapted to your personal preferences. These devices are getting smaller all the time and are discreet. However, they are not suitable for everyone.



Here is one example of a hearing aid. There are many types.

> **“Hearing amplifiers”:** Examples are an amplified telephone and amplification system (with or without headphones) for television.

If necessary, the audiologist will refer you to another health care professional.

## What can I do to protect my hearing?

Expose yourself as little as possible to loud noises:

- Lower the volume of your car radio and portable music player.
- Avoid noisy places (bars, discos, construction sites, etc.) as much as possible.

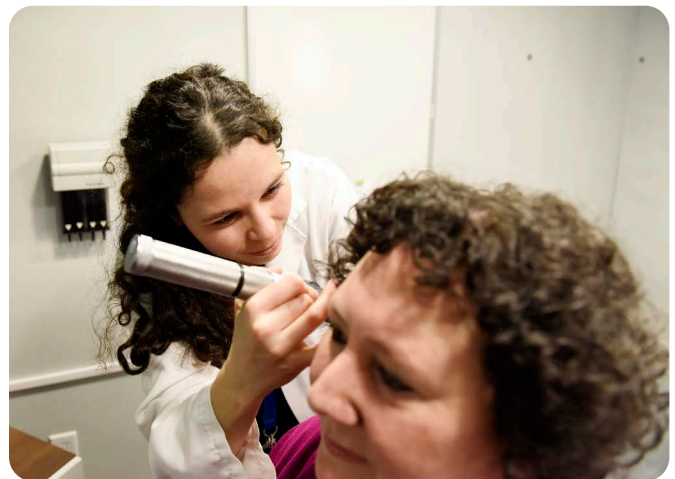
If you can't avoid exposure to high noise, use **noise-reducing earplugs or headphones**. However, their effectiveness is limited.



Also, if you've just been exposed to loud noises, don't plan another activity in a noisy place the next day. This will give your ears a “rest”.

## When should I see a doctor?

- > If your ears hurt. Don't try to relieve this pain with over-the-counter products.
- > If you're taking medications and you think one of them may be causing any of these side effects:
  - difficulty hearing
  - whistling or buzzing in the ears
  - loss of balance or dizziness



## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions, see an audiologist. To make an appointment, you might need a referral from a doctor or another health professional.



### NOTEPAD



#### Questions




#### Resource people and contacts




#### CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

**514 890-8086**

**24 hours a day, 7 days a week**

You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.



#### USEFUL RESOURCES

Department of Audiology, Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM) (French only):

> **chumontreal.qc.ca**

Type "Audiologie" in the search box.

Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec. A directory of members is available:

📞 **514 282-9123 or 1 888 232-9123**

> **ooaq.qc.ca** (French only)

Association des devenus sourds et des malentendants du Québec:

📞 **450 657-8500**

> **adsmqam.org** (French only)

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site

**chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante**

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
**chumontreal.qc.ca**