

Hearing Loss in Adults

Hearing is one of our most important senses. It helps us to communicate, to be warned about danger, and to be aware of the world around us.

Nearly 1 out of every 4 Canadian adults report some degree of hearing loss or hearing disability. The prevalence of hearing loss rises with age. About 65 per cent of people over the age of 70 have hearing problems.

People over the age of 60 should schedule routine hearing tests every 2 years. If hearing loss is detected, hearing tests should be conducted once a year.

What are the signs that you may have hearing loss?

You may have hearing loss if you find that you often:

- find that speech is muffled or unclear
- ask people to repeat themselves or speak louder;
- have difficulty understanding or following conversations in quiet or noisy places;
- you must concentrate to understand what people say; or
- have ringing, hissing, or clicking noises in your ear.

What are the different types of hearing loss?

There are 2 types of hearing loss: conductive hearing loss and sensorineural hearing loss. A person can have hearing loss that is part conductive and part sensorineural.

Conductive Hearing Loss

A problem in the outer or middle part of the ear may cause a conductive hearing loss. This may

be caused by a wax blockage, punctured eardrum or an ear infection. Conductive hearing loss is usually temporary and can often be treated.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss

A problem with the inner part of the ear or hearing nerve may cause a sensorineural hearing loss. This type of hearing loss tends to be progressive and permanent. Aging is the number one cause of sensorineural hearing loss. It can also be caused by very loud noise, disease, injury, certain medicines, or it can be congenital.

Congenital hearing loss can be either conductive, sensorineural, or both, and refers to hearing loss that was present when you were born. It can be hereditary (genetic) or it can be the result of other factors or conditions.

Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss

This type of hearing loss is commonly known as sudden deafness. It is most often an unexplained, rapid loss of hearing in one or both ears. The most common causes are viral or bacterial infections, drugs that harm the sensory cells in the inner ear, or autoimmune diseases. The most common treatment for sudden sensorineural hearing loss is with corticosteroids.

This type of hearing loss should be considered a medical emergency. Anyone who experiences these symptoms should visit a health care provider immediately.

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

If you think you have hearing loss, you should make an appointment with your health care provider who may refer you to one of the following professionals:

- **Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Doctor** - An

ENT Doctor is a medical specialist in diseases of the ear, nose, throat, and related concerns.

- **Audiologist** - An Audiologist diagnoses hearing loss and prescribes, dispenses and fits hearing aids, and offers hearing rehabilitation and counseling.
- **Hearing Instrument Practitioner** - A Hearing Instrument Practitioner tests hearing, and prescribes, dispenses, and fits hearing aids.

You can make an appointment directly with an Audiologist or a Hearing Instrument Practitioner without a referral.

If your hearing seems to deteriorate or drop rapidly (over the span of 1 to 3 days) you should seek emergency medical attention immediately.

Will a hearing aid help?

Hearing aids do not cure hearing loss but they do help improve your hearing and your ability to communicate. A hearing aid is a small battery-powered electronic device that is programmed specifically to meet the needs of a person's individual hearing loss and can be adapted to different situational needs (such as work environments).

People with hearing loss can improve communication with a properly fitted hearing aid, counselling, or environmental changes.

Do I have to pay for a hearing aid?

Hearing aids are not covered under the Medical Services Plan (MSP). There are limited alternative funding options available that your Audiologist or Hearing Instrument Practitioner can advise you on.

What are the risks associated with hearing loss on older adults?

When hearing loss remains un-treated in older adults, they may experience a significant reduction quality of life and are at risk of poorer long-term health outcomes. Adults with un-treated hearing loss may become:

- withdrawn and socially isolated which can lead to risk of depression;
- fatigued, anxious and/or confused;
- are at greater risk of falling which increases with the severity of the hearing loss.

The importance of early detection and intervention

Identifying and aiding hearing loss early helps preserve the brain's ability to receive and use the incoming sounds in a meaningful way.

- the longer you wait to aid hearing loss, the harder it is for your brain to adapt to the sound of hearing aids;
- the benefits of hearing aids increase, the sooner and more consistently you use them;
- you have more time to plan or find funding for the expenses associated with hearing loss; and
- early intervention keeps the brain sharp and can reduce the cost of hearing aids by reducing the need for additional technical features to help you process sound

For More Information

Contact the College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of BC for a list of Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Practitioners in your area or visit www.cshhpbc.org/ to view the registry online.

Visit BC Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists (BCASLPA) at www.bcaslpa.ca.