

Hearing loss – are you affected?

About one in ten New Zealanders experience problems with hearing. If you're affected, you might find that

- People in noisy places are hard to hear
- You often need people to repeat themselves
- You have trouble hearing on the phone
- You need the television turned up louder than others prefer

These problems might be annoying you—or seem to be annoying others around you.

But unless you have a profound hearing loss, there's usually something that can be done to improve things. The first step is to have your hearing tested.

Who is affected by hearing loss?

Anyone can experience hearing loss. Ten percent of New Zealanders suffer from a hearing loss that affects their daily lives. One third of New Zealanders over 65 are affected.

Most people have had temporary hearing loss at least once—perhaps from short exposure to loud noise, a bad cold or flying.

If you experience hearing loss for more than two days, see your doctor.

Hearing loss—what's it like?

People with hearing loss often find that sounds are less loud than they used to be. Sounds may also be less clear.

A person with hearing loss might think that people are speaking very softly or from far away. Or that people's voices are distorted—perhaps too distorted to understand.

Common causes of hearing loss

Some children suffer damage to their hearing mechanisms before or during birth. Some families have a history of hearing loss that is passed from one generation to the next.

As life goes on, things like illness, accident, over-exposure to noise, or simply getting older, can all cause hearing loss.

Other causes include

- Too much ear wax
- Ear infection
- Damage to the eardrum
- Some drugs—prescribed medication or illegal
- Head injury

If you experience hearing loss, a doctor, audiologist or hearing therapist can help you identify possible

causes. And help you find ways to fix, minimise or manage the problem.

Preventing hearing loss

Some sorts of hearing loss are easier to prevent than others.

There is a saying that you should never put anything smaller than an elbow into your ear! That's good advice for avoiding a ruptured eardrum.

Never use things like cotton buds, matchsticks and hairpins to clean or scratch your ear canal.

Avoid ear damage from over-exposure to noise by wearing earplugs or ear muffs whenever you're doing noisy jobs. That includes things like lawn mowing or using power tools.

And take care with the volume on personal stereos—especially when the headphones plug straight into your ears.

How do you diagnose a hearing loss?

To diagnose a hearing loss, you need a professional hearing test.

LIFE Unlimited Hearing Therapists provide free hearing tests all over New Zealand. To find a hearing therapist in your area, call free 0800 008 011.

Or you can visit an audiologist. To see a publicly funded audiologist, you need a referral from a doctor or hearing therapist. To see an audiologist privately, just make an appointment.

You can find a private audiologist by looking under **Hearing** in the Yellow Pages phone directory. Or visiting the NZ Audiological Society's website—www.audiology.org.nz

But first, consider visiting your doctor or a specialist Ear Nurse. They can check your ears for problems like excess wax or an undiagnosed ear infection. They can also recommend and refer you to the best professional help for you.

What help is available?

If you are diagnosed with a hearing loss, something can usually be done to help your situation. Options include

- Using assistive devices—like amplified telephones
- Learning new communication strategies
- Hearing aids

A hearing therapist or your local Hearing Association can offer or direct you to many sources of help.

Hearing aids

These days, hearing aids are light and unobtrusive. They range from simple, easy-to-operate models, through to highly advanced options.

A good audiologist can explain what's available. Most importantly, they'll let you trial the aids. Together, you'll find the best match for you.

Whatever you do, be sure to seek help if you think you have a hearing loss.

If you just put up with it, you will get less and less enjoyment out of life. And your hearing loss may get worse.

Having a hearing loss can be tiring, socially isolating and very frustrating. Yet there's usually something that can be done to improve things. Or prevent hearing loss from getting worse. If you're affected by hearing loss, seek help early from a hearing professional.

More information & support NFD (National Foundation for the Deaf)

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We've prepared these fact sheets using information from external sources and advice from NZ based experts. Please feel free to copy or use any of the material.

The information, while accurate at time of printing cannot replace expert advice from a hearing professional. Always seek help quickly for any ear or hearing problem.

Published 2008