

What is hearing?

- Hearing is one of our 5 senses. Hearing refers to the awareness of sound in our world and placing meaning to that sound. It begins when noise vibrations travel through the ear and then to the brain.
- Hearing has two parts.
 - One part is basic hearing – the ears' ability to sense sound.
 - The second part is *auditory processing*. Auditory processing is the brain's ability to process and understand what is heard. This handout is specifically addressing basic hearing and does not cover auditory processing. You can learn more about auditory processing in the handout on **Auditory Processing** in the [Thinking and Communication Symptoms Section](#).

What is hearing loss?

- Over 80 million people in the US have some degree of hearing loss. It is one of the most common health problems in the United States.
- To understand hearing loss, it can be helpful to learn how sound is measured. Sound is measured by:
 - its volume (how loud or soft the sound is)
 - its pitch (how high or low the tone is)
- Hearing loss is usually described as slight, mild, moderate, severe, or profound, depending upon how well a person can hear the volume or pitches most strongly associated with speech.
- Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent.
- There are 3 types of hearing loss:
 - *Conductive Hearing Loss* is a result of problems in the middle or outer ear. In some cases, this type of loss can be temporary.
 - Common causes include colds, allergies, ear infections, earwax blocking the ear canal
 - *Sensorineural Hearing Loss* is a result of problems with the auditory nerve or with the sensory hair cells in the inner ear. This is the most common type of permanent hearing loss.
 - Common causes include illness, harmful drugs, a jolt or blow to the head, ongoing exposure to loud noise, and age-related hearing loss.
 - *Mixed Hearing Loss* is a combination of conductive and sensorineural hearing loss that occurs at the same time.
- Multiple factors within the ears can impact the ability to hear sounds and to hear others speaking. Other factors that can impact hearing include:
 - Poor room acoustics (sound echoing in a large room)
 - Unclear messages (the speaker is mumbling or has a mask over their mouth)
 - Background noise (other people talking or noise in the background)
 - Distorted sounds (like listening to a message through a phone or speaker system)



What can I do if I have hearing loss?

- Helpful strategies for dealing with hearing loss include:
 - Look directly at people's faces when they speak
 - Reduce background noise as much as possible
 - Ask people to repeat or clarify information you do not understand
 - If hearing aids are recommended, wear them, and keep up with any required maintenance
 - Use the closed captioning features on your TV, computer, or other devices

What can others do to help?

- Helpful strategies to help others with hearing loss include:
 - Establish eye contact with the listener
 - Repeat information if the person does not hear or understand what you have said
 - Speak loudly, clearly, and directly (be careful not to shout)
 - Avoid talking or asking questions from another room
 - Have important conversations in a quiet environment

How to get help for hearing loss?

- You should seek help for hearing loss if you experience any of the following:
 - Have a sudden loss of hearing
 - Can no longer identify familiar voices
 - Start to avoid social situations because of difficulty hearing
 - Keep turning up the volume on the TV or when listening to music
 - Have ringing in your ears (tinnitus) that is bothersome and/or does not get better
- An Otolaryngologist, also called an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) Physician, or an Audiologist are medical providers who can assess your hearing. You can learn more about seeing an ENT at <https://www.enthealth.org/> or an Audiologist at <https://www.asha.org/public/who-are-audiologists/>

Additional Comments:

