

HEARING LOSS AND AGE

Hearing loss – a common problem



Hearing loss is more common than you might think. It affects more than half of all Australians over the age of 60.¹



What happens to our hearing?

Presbycusis (prez-bee-cue-sis) is the term for what goes wrong with the hearing mechanism when our ears age. It occurs in most people as they grow older.

The hearing loss associated with presbycusis usually affects high-pitched sounds first.

This means that some speech sounds like 's' and 'f' and 't' will be harder to hear than others. So words which are quite different can sound the same, like tea/pea/key, shop/shot/shock, fine/shine/sign.

People with presbycusis often say, 'I can hear but I can't understand,' and this is why.

You may also find that you have difficulty following conversations in noisy places, or that tinnitus ('head noises') is causing you problems.

Presbycusis develops slowly and gradually, and at first you may not realise your hearing is diminishing.

Early hearing loss can be hard to recognise

When hearing deteriorates slowly, many people find ways of minimising the effects, such as lipreading, avoiding social situations where there is a lot of

background noise, and becoming good at using non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, body language and gestures.

The hearing loss may not be recognised because of these coping strategies, or because the loss has happened so gradually. In fact, other people often notice the hearing loss before the person who has it.

What can be done?

Sometimes hearing loss can be due to excessive wax or an ear infection, both of which can be easily treated. But if your hearing loss is more permanent, you may benefit from hearing aids or other listening devices.

131 797

www.hearing.com.au

Hearing aids have come a long way in the last ten years. They are smaller, more sophisticated, and can be adjusted to suit individual hearing losses better than in the past.

Alternative listening devices such as telephone amplifiers can also help in certain circumstances.

Most people can get great benefit from a well-fitted hearing aid and/or listening device, and listening can become a pleasure again.

Help is at hand

People with a hearing loss can feel isolated and frustrated but the good news is that there is help at hand.

How Australian Hearing can help

Australian Hearing is the largest hearing services provider in Australia, and offers a range of leading hearing aid technology to provide eligible people with the best possible hearing solutions to manage their hearing impairment and deliver a better quality of life.

1. Wilson D, Walsh PG, Sanchez L and Read P: Hearing Impairment in an Australian Population, Centre for Population Studies in Epidemiology, South Australian Department of Human Services, 1998.



'They can hear when they want to'

When it comes to hearing loss, misunderstandings abound.

Hearing loss has been called the invisible handicap because it cannot be seen by other people. Blindness usually elicits sympathy and concern, while a person who cannot hear well is more likely to experience irritation and impatience from others.

Difficulties with communication can cause frustration, social isolation and loneliness. This may lead to low self esteem, withdrawal and depression.

So be patient with someone who cannot hear well. Speak to them clearly and allow for the need to repeat on occasions, because they probably can't hear when they want to.

Here are some tips to help you communicate better with someone with a hearing loss:

- Face the person directly, and be at the same eye level if possible. Talk normally—don't shout.
- Keep your hands away from your face, so they can see all your face, and make sure the light is not shining in their eyes.
- Reduce background noise—turn off the radio or television.
- If you are not understood, find a different way of saying the same thing.
- Be aware that they might have difficulty understanding speech, even with a hearing aid.

Australian Hearing provides subsidised hearing services for eligible people. For full details of our eligibility criteria visit www.hearing.com.au or contact your nearest hearing centre on **131 797**.