



# Hearing loss and deafness

This page describes the types of hearing loss and how these different types of hearing loss may affect you.

## What types of hearing loss are there?

Hearing loss is generally classed as **sensori-neural**, **conductive** or **mixed**.

All hearing loss types can be either acquired (occur due to age, a disease process or injury) or congenital (something occurring or identified at birth).

**Sensori-neural** hearing loss occurs when there is a problem in the inner ear; of either the cochlea (sensori) or the auditory nerve (neural), which disturbs the sound signals being sent to the brain for understanding. This type of loss is most often seen with ageing but can be seen with noise damage. Sensori-neural hearing loss is usually permanent.

**Conductive** hearing loss occurs when there is a problem in the outer or middle ear which stops the sounds reaching the hearing nerve. It can be caused by a blockage in the outer or middle ear, or problems with the function of the middle ear bones. The nerve usually works normally. This type of loss is often seen with ear infections. Conductive losses can sometimes be helped with medical treatment or surgery.

**Mixed** hearing loss occurs when there are problems with sounds travelling through both the middle ear and inner ear.

## What levels of hearing loss are there?

Hearing loss levels can be mild, moderate, severe or profound. This is decided with the results of your hearing test. A mild hearing loss usually means you have some minor hearing difficulties in some situations, while a profound hearing loss means you can't hear any sounds without an amplification device such as a hearing aid or cochlear implant.

## How does hearing loss affect me?

Sensori-neural hearing loss affects both the loudness and the quality of the sounds around you. People generally describe this as being aware that people are speaking but not being able to understand them. This can be worse in noisy environments or over distance. This is called loss of sound *discrimination*.

Conductive hearing loss mostly affects the loudness of the sound. People with this type of loss do particularly well with hearing aids if they are indicated.

The level and type of hearing loss you have will decide whether a hearing device will help you. Not all clients want or need a hearing device. Some people may be referred for further advice depending on the results of their hearing assessment.