

*The information provided here should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. It is not a substitute for professional care. If your child has any health concerns, please consult your health care provider.*

## **Auditory Impairments**

### **Introduction**

An auditory impairment is a reduction or defect in the ability to perceive sound. Individuals with complete hearing loss are considered deaf. An auditory impairment occurs when there's a problem with, or damage to one or more parts of the ear. Hearing impairments can be from a congenital defect, which is present at birth, or an acquired defect, which occurs in childhood or later in life. The impairment may also be genetic, or due to the surrounding environment. The degree of the hearing impairment can vary widely from one child to the next.

### **Diagnosis**

Auditory / hearing impairments are often difficult to diagnose due to a child's inability to communicate. Screening for hearing impairments for your infant will typically take place before leaving the hospital. Other times, parents notice the child is not responding to noises or verbal communication. Early intervention and diagnosis of a hearing impairment is important to the child's overall development and this will also assist the child in learning alternative methods of communication.

A Parent's Guide to Hearing Loss, produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program, explains hearing loss in the following way:

The ear is divided into three parts:

**Outer Ear:** The outer ear is made up of the parts we see (pinna), the ear canal, and eardrum (tympanic membrane).

**Middle Ear:** The middle ear is made up of the eardrum and three small bones (ossicles) that send the movement of the eardrum to the inner ear.

**Inner Ear:** The inner ear is made up of the snail shaped organ for hearing (called the cochlea) and the nerves that go to the brain.

There are three types of hearing impairments: conductive hearing loss, sensorineural hearing loss, and mixed hearing loss. These terms describe hearing loss based on the part of the ear that is not working in the usual way:

**A conductive loss** — hearing loss caused by something that stops sounds from getting through the outer or middle ear.

**A sensorineural loss** — hearing loss that occurs when there is a problem in the way the inner ear or hearing nerve works.

**A mixed hearing loss** — hearing loss that includes a conductive and a sensorineural hearing loss.

These terms describe the degree or the amount of hearing loss a child has:

**Mild Hearing Loss** — a person with a mild hearing loss may hear some speech sounds but soft sounds are hard to hear.

**Moderate Hearing Loss** — a person with a moderate hearing loss may hear almost no speech when another person is talking at a normal level.

**Severe Hearing Loss** — a person with severe hearing loss will hear no speech of a person talking at a normal level and only some loud sounds.

**Profound Hearing Loss** — a person with a profound hearing loss will not hear any speech and only very loud sounds.

These terms describe when the hearing loss happened:

**Pre-lingual** — the hearing loss occurred before the child learned to talk.

**Post-lingual** — the hearing loss occurred after the child learned to talk.

These terms describe the side or sides on which the hearing loss occurs:

**Unilateral** — there is a hearing loss in one ear.

**Bilateral** — there is a hearing loss in both ears.

Professionals will use these terms to describe a child's unique type of hearing loss when talking to others.

Suggested sites for additional information regarding auditory impairments:

Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program at:

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi/)

American Academy of Audiology at:

[www.audiology.org/aboutaudiology/consumered/guides/](http://www.audiology.org/aboutaudiology/consumered/guides/)

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