What is Hearing Loss?

**CONTEXT**

Hearing loss is a common problem caused by exposure to loud noise, infections, environmental pollutants, aging, and/or genetic variations.

Hearing loss is different for every person and can develop at any age. People with unmanaged hearing loss may find it hard to converse, respond to warning sounds, and hear doorbells and phones. They may also experience tinnitus—a ringing, hissing, or roaring noise in one or both ears that doesn’t come from an external sound source.

Hearing loss comes in many forms and can range from mild loss of hearing sensitivity to a total loss of hearing in both ears. Hearing loss can affect one ear only or it can be in both ears (referred to as bilateral hearing loss). Typically, hearing loss is described in “degrees of severity” with mild being less hearing loss all the way to profound which would indicate the severest of hearing loss degrees. It is important to know that even milder degrees of hearing loss can affect a person’s quality of life and that it often depends on an individual’s lifestyle.

Sudden loss of hearing, also known as sudden sensorineural hearing loss, is a rare, unexplained rapid loss of hearing. It can happen all at once or over several days and should be considered a medical emergency.

However, most hearing loss happens over time. Age-related hearing loss, also called presbycusis, comes on gradually and seems to run in families. A person with presbycusis may not be able to tolerate loud sounds and find it difficult to understand what others are saying.

Bilateral hearing loss as referred to in this document refers to the inability to hear 25 decibels or lower in the better hearing ear. A person with this level of hearing loss may benefit by using adaptive listening strategies. The inability to hear in the 26-40 decibels range impedes a person’s ability to recognize normal speech. However, it is important to recognize that hearing loss can occur at milder levels of severity in either ear. Slight hearing loss in one or both ears is extremely common and may be difficult to recognize without the help of a hearing loss professional.
FACTS/CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS

Loud noise, particularly over an extended time period, is a common cause of hearing loss. Noise from lawn mowers, snow or leaf blowers, heavy traffic, using firearms, or loud music can cause permanent hearing loss.

Earwax or fluid buildup in the ear can block sounds carried from the ear canal to the inner ear.

A ruptured eardrum damaged by infection, pressure, or putting objects in the ear, including cotton-tipped swabs, can cause hearing loss.

Health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure can contribute to hearing loss.

Certain medications, including some antibiotics and drugs used to treat cancer and heart disease, can damage the inner ear which may result in permanent hearing loss.

Hearing loss is sometimes caused by genetic mutations.

Sources


https://hearinghealthfoundation.org/causes-of-hearing-loss