

Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is the most common sensory impairment in adults over the age of 65, affecting more than 30% of Canadians in this age group. More than 50% of Canadians over the age of 65 have an **inner ear** hearing loss. Inner ear hearing loss is usually not reversible. Some of its causes, such as noise damage, are preventable by wearing hearing protection or avoiding very loud environments (such as rock concerts).¹

Whether a hearing loss is small (missing certain sounds) or large (deafness), it is a serious concern. Hearing problems can get worse if they are not treated.

How Can Hearing Loss Affect Me?

Sometimes hearing problems can make you feel embarrassed, upset, and lonely. It is easy to withdraw when you cannot follow a conversation at the dinner table or in a restaurant.

It is also easy for friends and family to think you are confused, uncaring, or difficult, when the problem may be that you just cannot hear well.

Hearing loss does not have to keep you from enjoying life. Depending on the type and extent of your hearing loss, there are many treatment choices that may help.

Warning Signs of Hearing Loss

Signs of hearing loss in adults may include:

- speaking louder than necessary in a conversation;
- constantly asking for words to be repeated;
- straining to hear;
- misunderstanding conversations;
- favouring one ear;
- thinking that people always mumble;
- turning the television or radio up louder than usual;
- having difficulty hearing on the telephone;
- withdrawing from social contact;
- ringing or buzzing in the ears (tinnitus);
- appearing dull and disinterested; and
- being slow to respond.²

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada (2006). *Hearing loss info sheet for seniors*. Division of Aging and Seniors Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved, September 30, 2008 from, http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/info_sheets/hearing_loss/index.htm.

² Public Health Agency of Canada (2006).

(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)

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What Should I Do? If you have trouble hearing, talk to your primary health care team. Sometimes the diagnosis and treatment can take place in the doctor's office.

You may be referred to an otolaryngologist, a doctor who specializes in the ear, nose, and throat. This doctor will take a medical history, do a thorough exam, and suggest any needed tests.

You may also be referred to an audiologist, a health care professional who is trained to check your hearing using simple and painless tests.

What Is Available to Help Me Hear Better?

Other Assistive and Adaptive Devices

If you need hearing assistance, the audiologist may recommend a hearing aid. The audiologist can help you select the best type of hearing aid for your particular hearing problem, and help you learn to get the most from it.

A hearing aid is worn in or behind your ear. It can help some kinds of hearing loss by making sounds louder. However, it sometimes picks up background noises, traffic sounds, or other people talking that can affect how well you hear in certain situations.

The audiologist will teach you how to adjust the hearing aid for different situations. The audiologist can also help you determine whether you are eligible for any funding assistance to help cover the costs of a hearing aid (i.e. Ministry of Health, Assistive Devices Program or third party insurance coverage).

- **Alerts.** Signals devices for doorbells, smoke detectors, and alarm clocks and other devices are available. Signals range from flashing lights to vibrating devices.
- **Cochlear implants.** In this surgery, doctors implant a small electronic device under the skin behind the ear. The device sends the message past the non-working part of the inner ear and on to the brain. This device may not be helpful for all types of hearing loss.

What Can I Do If I Have Problems Hearing? If you have trouble hearing, you can help yourself, and the people you are talking to, by doing the following things:

- Let people know that you have trouble hearing.
- Ask people to face you, and to speak more slowly and clearly; also ask them to speak without shouting.

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**If I Have
Problems
Hearing?**

(Continued)

Resources

- Pay attention to what is being said and to facial expressions or gestures.
- Let the person talking know if you do not understand.
- Ask people to reword a sentence and try again.

Organizations and Web Resources

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

Web site: www.chha.ca

Canadian Hearing Society

Web site: www.chs.ca

**Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists
(CASLPA)**

Web site: www.caslpa.ca

Tinnitus Association of Canada

Web site: www.kadis.com/ta/tinnitus.htm

Canadian Academy of Audiology

Web site: www.canadianaudiology.ca

Community Resources

Ontario Chapter for the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

PO Box 128, Station "C"

Toronto, Ontario M6J 3M9

Kurt Lynn, President

Tel. 416 588-1119 (Voice)

Fax: 416-531-7594

Web site: www.chha.on.ca

E-mail: kurt@chha.on.ca

Kingston Hard of Hearing Club

Suite 517, 829 Norwest Road

Kingston, Ontario K7P 2N3

Margaret Shenton, President

Tel. 613-378-2457 (Voice)

E-mail: mshenton@sympatico.ca

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Resources **Canadian Hearing Society**
(Continued) **Hearing Care Counselling Program**

Belleville Branch

Bayview Mall
470 Dundas St E, Unit 51
Belleville, Ontario K8N 1G1
Tel. 613 966-8995
Tel. 613 966-7381 (TTY)
Fax. 613 966-8365

Kingston Branch

Frontenac Mall
1300 Bath Road, Unit D 4
Kingston, Ontario K7M 4X4
Tel. 613 544-1927
Tel. 613 544-2765 (TTY)
Tel. 613 542-2335 (VCO)
Fax. 613 544 1975

Brockville Branch

68 William St, Suite 205
Brockville, Ontario K6V 4V5
Tel. 613 498-3933
Tel. 613 498-3317 (TTY)
Fax. 613 498-0363

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