

# Types of Hearing Loss

Hearing losses may be located in the external, middle or inner ear or in a mixture of all three places. Damage to any part of the external, middle or inner ear can cause a hearing loss.

The different types of hearing loss are:

## Conductive Hearing Loss

If there is a problem in the external or middle ear, a *conductive* hearing loss exists. This means sound is not being conducted properly to the inner ear.

Common causes of conductive hearing loss are:

- wax in the external ear;
- fluid in the middle ear;
- a hole or tear (perforation) in the eardrum;
- improper development of the outer or middle ear;
- damage to the small bones in the middle ear;
- an infection in the middle ear; or
- a blockage in the Eustachian tube meaning that air cannot move into the middle ear.

Conductive hearing losses do not cause the hearing to be lost completely but there is a loss of volume. Sounds may be quiet but there is no distortion.

Sometimes this is from too much fluid in the middle ear which means the three small bones cannot vibrate properly. This is sometimes called "glue ear."

If a child has repeated ear infections, these may cause more permanent damage to the inner ear.

## Sensorineural Hearing Loss (SNHL or nerve deafness)

If a problem occurs in the inner ear or auditory nerve, the hearing loss is sensorineural. Some people call this "nerve deafness." With this type of deafness, there are problems with the cochlear or the nerve which carries sound to the brain

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[www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au](http://www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au)

Helpline 1800 645 916 Email [helpline@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:helpline@deafchildren.org.au)

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Sensorineural losses can range from mild to profound. Both the volume and clarity of sound are affected. Sound may be heard but it may be distorted.

### **What causes a sensorineural hearing loss?**

Common causes of sensorineural hearing loss in young children are:

- certain pre-natal infections
- lack of oxygen during birth
- genetic factors
- use of some certain drugs
- rubella
- premature birth

### **What are the genetic causes of hearing loss?**

There are an increasing number of genetic causes of hearing loss being identified.

For investigation into possible genetic causes of a hearing loss, contact:

Victoria	The Paediatric Hearing Loss Investigation Clinic Monash Medical Centre, Clayton	Ph: 03 9594 6666
Victoria	Genetic Health Services Victoria Murdoch Children's Research Institute 10th Floor, Royal Children's Hospital Flemington Rd, Parkville	Ph: 03 8 341 6201 Fax: 03 8341 6390
Western Australia	Genetic Services of WA Princess Margaret Hospital for Children Roberts Rd, Subiaco, WA. 6008	Ph: 08 9340 8828 Ph: 08 9340 1525 Fax: 08 9340 7058
Tasmania	The Royal Melbourne Hospital Genetic Services visits Hobart, Launceston and the North West.	As for Royal Melbourne Hospital
Queensland	Queensland Clinical Genetics Services Royal Children's Hospital Back Road, Bramston Terrace Entrance Herston Qld	Ph: 07 3636 1686 Fax: 07 3253 1987
Queensland	Mater Children's Hospital	Ph: 07 3840 8195
New South Wales	Royal North Shore Centre for Genetic Education St Leonards 2065	Ph: 02 9926 7324 Fax: 02 9906 7529
New South Wales	Department of Medical Genetics Level 2 Sydney Children's Hospital High St Randwick 2031	Ph: 02 9382 1704

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## Mixed Hearing Loss

When there is a combination of both a sensorineural and conductive hearing loss, it is called a mixed hearing loss. Children with a sensorineural hearing loss can also have or develop middle ear problems, such as fluid in the middle ear.

## Unilateral Hearing Loss (Deafness in One Ear)

A unilateral hearing loss means a hearing loss in one ear only. The other ear has normal hearing. Difficulties associated with this type of loss are locating the source of sound and hearing in background noise. Children with unilateral hearing losses may also have problems in the classroom, both in relation to hearing and socialization. Teachers need to be aware of the hearing loss so that strategies can be put in place.

## Progressive or Acquired Hearing Loss

Some people's hearing will degenerate with age or the progression of a syndrome which affects that person's hearing. Or through damage to the ear through an acquired source – eg: the use of in the ear buds for amplification of music, or through industrial noise.

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## References

### Books

"Choices" Australian Hearing.

<http://www.hearing.com.au/fact-sheets>

This is a free, comprehensive book for parents and carers of children with a hearing loss which been produced by Australian Hearing. This book is highly recommended and is available from your nearest Australian Hearing office.

### Websites

**National Deaf Children's Society** [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

This is an excellent website with lots of information on childhood hearing loss. It has a wealth of topics for families to explore.

**Meningitis** - [www.ndcs.org.uk/information/childhood\\_deafness/meningitis/index.html](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/information/childhood_deafness/meningitis/index.html)

This is also from National Deaf Children's Society and gives a good overview of meningitis in children.

**Boys Town National Research Hospital: Information on Genetics**

[www.boystownhospital.org/parents/info/genetics.asp](http://www.boystownhospital.org/parents/info/genetics.asp)

This site explains different types of genetic hearing losses. It explains basic concepts, genetic syndromes and individual perspectives.

**Hereditary Hearing Loss and Deafness Overview** -

[www.geneclinics.org/query?dz=deafness-overview](http://www.geneclinics.org/query?dz=deafness-overview)

This American site lists different genetic causes of hearing loss with a brief explanation, as well as different causes of hearing loss and hearing tests.

**Ushers**

**Syndrome** [www.disability.vic.gov.au/dsonline/dsarticles.nsf/pages/Usher\\_syndrome](http://www.disability.vic.gov.au/dsonline/dsarticles.nsf/pages/Usher_syndrome)

This site has information relating to Ushers Syndrome

**Ear Problems in Children**

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Ear\\_problems\\_in\\_children](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Ear_problems_in_children)

This site lists the common causes of ear problems in children.

**Middle Ear Infections**

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Middle\\_ear\\_infections?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Middle_ear_infections?OpenDocument)

This site discusses middle ear infections in children

**Deafness: A Range of**

**Causes** [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Deafness\\_-\\_a\\_range\\_of\\_causes?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Deafness_-_a_range_of_causes?OpenDocument)

This site lists the causes of deafness

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