

Causes and Types of Hearing Loss

"Living" Causes Hearing Loss

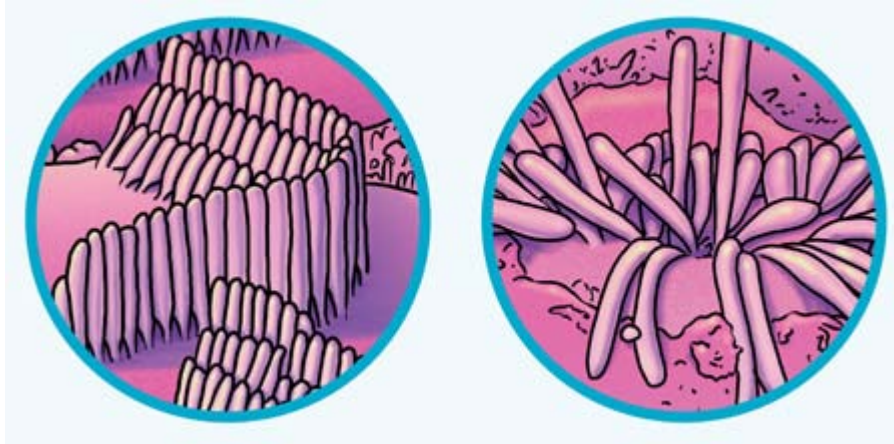
The majority of hearing losses are a result of aging—and it starts much earlier than you might think. One in ten Americans has hearing loss and 65 percent of them are below retirement age. Changes in hearing begin at age 20 with significant decline in hearing ability as early as 40 years of age. At age 65 and older, one in three people has some type of hearing impairment.

There are three types of hearing loss including: sensorineural hearing loss, conductive hearing loss and mixed hearing loss.

Sensorineural hearing loss

This occurs when inner ear nerves are damaged and do not properly transmit sound signals to the brain. It is the most common type of hearing loss caused by the withering of the hair cells in the inner ear due to age, noise damage or medications. Without the hair cells the ear cannot detect sounds properly.

Healthy and damaged hair cells



When hair cells are damaged – by loud sounds, aging or disease – they cannot grow back.

Causes of sensorineural hearing loss:

- Aging
- Injury
- Excessive noise exposure
- Viral infections (such as measles or mumps)
- Ototoxic drugs (medications that damage hearing)
- Meningitis
- Diabetes
- Stroke
- High fever
- Ménière's disease (a disorder of the inner ear that can affect hearing and balance)
- Acoustic tumors
- Heredity

Conductive hearing loss

This type of hearing loss is typically the result of obstructions in the outer or middle ear, which prevent sound from entering the middle ear. Voices and sounds may sound faint, distorted or both. Most conductive hearing loss cases can be treated medically or surgically.

Causes of conductive hearing loss are typically “obstructions” such as:

- Infections of the ear canal or middle ear resulting in fluid or pus buildup
- Perforation or scarring of the eardrum
- Wax buildup
- Dislocation of the middle ear bones (ossicles)
- Foreign objects in the ear canal
- Otosclerosis (an abnormal bone growth in the middle ear)
- Abnormal growths or tumors

Mixed hearing loss

This type of hearing loss is a combination of sensorineural and conductive hearing loss.