

Patient Information

Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss

Ears, Nose and Throat Department

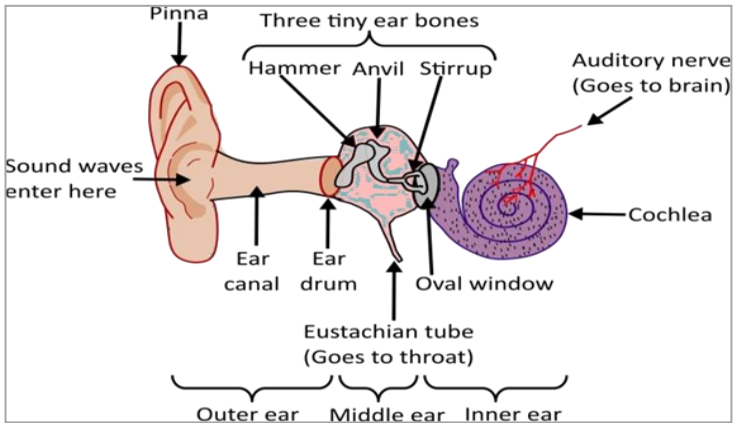


What is sudden sensorineural hearing loss?

It is the rapid loss of hearing in the ear or the hearing nerve, occurring over a period of up to 72 hours. It causes a noticeable hearing loss for most sounds, typically in one ear, and can vary in severity. Most commonly, a person will wake up and notice the hearing loss. Other symptoms which may accompany the sudden loss in hearing include:

- Distortion of sounds in the poorer hearing ear.
- Tinnitus, which is the awareness of internal sounds in the ears or head.
- Imbalance, dizziness.
- A blocked or full feeling in the ear (aural fullness).
- Nausea/vomiting.
- Feelings of anxiety.

There is a low incidence of sudden sensorineural hearing loss, with 5-20 cases per 100,000 people. It occurs most often in people aged 30-60 years old. Both males and females are equally affected.



What causes it?

Sensorineural hearing loss can be caused by any inner ear problem. However, the specific cause of the hearing loss remains unknown in over 75% of cases. Causes include:

- Idiopathic (unknown).
- Viral infections of the cochlea.
- Blood flow abnormalities of the cochlea.
- Immune disorders (autoimmune inner ear disease)

- Metabolic causes.
- Toxic causes (drugs that harm the ear as a side effect).
- Trauma or head injury.
- In very rare cases, the sudden hearing loss may be caused by a growth on the auditory (hearing) nerve.

Will my hearing recover?

Recovery of the hearing can often depend on a number of factors. Prompt medical treatment and diagnosis will ensure the best chances of recovery. The outcomes are better if:

- The hearing loss is considered to be mild or moderate in degree.
- Treatment is received within 7 days.

Often, the greatest recovery in hearing will occur 1–2 weeks after the incident, however, some patients may have an improvement over a 12-month period.

What can be done?

Steroids are commonly administered in cases where the cause of the sudden hearing loss is unknown. Steroids have been shown to significantly improve the recovery of hearing. They work by reducing inflammation and swelling of the cochlea. The ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor may also get blood tests done along with radiological investigations, e.g. an MRI scan.

What are the long term outcomes?

In some cases of sudden sensorineural hearing loss, hearing may not recover. If this occurs, preservation of remaining hearing in both ears is important. Ways to prevent hearing deterioration include limiting the amount of noise exposure and using hearing protection when in noisy environments.

If hearing does not recover either spontaneously or with medical treatment, a hearing aid may be an option for the rehabilitation of the hearing loss.

Tinnitus can also continue to be present, regardless of whether hearing recovers or not. Tinnitus management, including relaxation and distraction techniques, can be of benefit to help reduce the perception of tinnitus.

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switchboard, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT Department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ☎ 111

Useful websites:

www.entuk.org/hearing-loss

www.nhs.uk/conditions/hearing-loss/

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

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