



Sudden Hearing Loss

What is Sudden Hearing Loss?

- It is a sensorineural hearing loss of 30 dB or more, in at least 3 consecutive frequencies, occurring instantaneously or rapidly over a period of 3 days or less.
- Its incidence is estimated as 5-20 cases per 100,000 people each year.
- It usually affects one ear (in 9 out of 10 cases).
- It should be considered a **medical emergency**, and you should visit your doctor as soon as possible.

What are the other symptoms that associated with Sudden Hearing Loss?

Distortion of sounds and/or speech.

Tinnitus (i.e. ringing in the ears).

Sensation of blocked or full ears (aural fullness).

Imbalance or dizziness.

Nausea or vomiting.

What Causes Sudden Hearing Loss?

There are many potential causes; the most common are:

- Infectious diseases (e.g. Syphilis, Lyme disease, Herpes)
- Viral infections of the cochlea.
- Trauma, such as head injury.
- Autoimmune diseases (e.g. Cogan syndrome)
- Ototoxicity (i.e. drugs that harm the sensory cells in the cochlea as a side effect).
- Blood circulation problems that disrupt the cochlear blood flow.
- Tumors affecting the auditory nerve.
- Disorders of the inner ear (e.g. Meniere's disease).
- Neurologic diseases/disorders (e.g. Multiple sclerosis).
- Unknown reasons.

However, the specific cause of sudden hearing loss is identified in only 10-15% of cases, and remains unknown in more than 75% of the cases.

How is Sudden Hearing Loss Diagnosed?

- Assessment begins with a detailed case history and examination by an audiologist and an ENT (ears, nose, and throat) physicians. Both specialists are needed to provide the highest quality care.
- The audiologist performs a full audiologic evaluation to determine the type (conductive, sensorineural, or mixed) and degree of hearing loss.
- The ENT conducts a medical examination and might request further tests (e.g. radiologic



imaging CT/MRI, balance tests, blood tests) to try to find out the underlying cause.

How is Sudden Hearing Loss Treated?

- If the cause of sudden hearing loss is known, then it is treated accordingly.
- Steroids (e.g. Cortisone, Prednisone) are the most common treatment, especially when the case is unknown.
- They usually work by fighting inflammation, reducing swelling, and enhancing blood flow in the cochlea. They have been shown to significantly improve the recovery of hearing.
- They are usually prescribed orally (i.e. pills), but may also be administered by direct injection through the eardrum into the middle ear and then the inner ear



Can the Hearing Recover?

- If diagnosed and treated early, there is a higher chance that hearing may recover, especially if treatment is received within 7 days or less.
- If the diagnosis and treatment is delayed, this decreases the effectiveness of treatment, and hearing loss may not fully recover or improve.

What if the Hearing Does Not Recover?

If hearing loss does not recover or improve, it is important to...

- Preserve the remaining hearing by avoiding exposure to loud noise and using hearing protection in noisy places.
- Use hearing aids or other implantable hearing devices after discussing the suitable and available options with the audiologist and ENT physician.
- Receive counseling to address hearing difficulties and strategies to facilitate communication.

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إدارة التشخيص الصحي

Communication and Swallowing
Disorders Dept.



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