



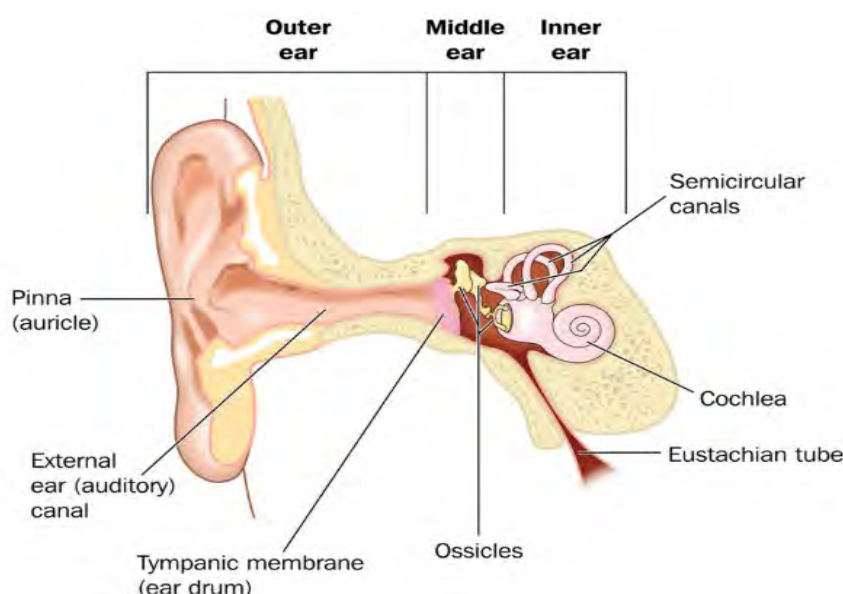
Your hearing loss explained – Understanding your test results

This leaflet will tell you about what hearing loss means and how it might affect you.

How do your ears work?

Your ears consist of 3 main parts; the outer, middle and inner ear. Sound waves enter the outer ear and travel down the ear canal to the eardrum causing it to vibrate. These vibrations are passed through 3 tiny bones (hammer, anvil and stirrup), known as the ossicles. The ossicles are located in the middle ear, which is an air filled space connected to the nose via the Eustachian tube.

Just beyond the ossicles is the inner ear, which houses the cochlea (organ of hearing). The cochlea contains thousands of tiny cells, which sense the sound vibrations and convert them to nerve signals. The brain translates these nerve signals into what we experience as sound.



Facts about hearing loss

Without diagnosis and appropriate intervention, hearing loss (even single sided deafness) can affect communication. This may be failing to follow conversation in social situations (leading to social isolation) or difficulties hearing in a work situation. Failing to address a hearing loss can lead to auditory deprivation. This occurs where the brain is deprived of sound over an extended period of time. It can lead to difficulties processing sound.

Types of hearing loss?

The type of hearing loss you have will depend on the part of the ear affected:

- **Sensorineural** (cochlea and/or auditory nerve)
 - o Due to deterioration of the sensory hair cells with the cochlea and/or deterioration of the hearing nerve.
 - o Often occurs naturally as part of the ageing process (presbycusis)
 - o Less common causes include; excessive noise exposure, certain medications, infectious diseases, head injury and birth complications.
 - o Some people also have a genetic predisposition
- **Conductive** (middle ear)
 - o Due to sound not being able to pass freely to the inner ear.
 - o May be due to blockage in the outer ear, such as excess ear wax.
 - o May be due to middle ear problems, such as congestion behind the eardrum, perforation of the eardrum or fixation of the middle ear bones.
- **Mixed** (cochlea and/or auditory nerve, plus the middle ear)
 - o Due to a combination of the two other types of hearing loss.

Degrees of hearing loss

- **Mild** (20-40 dB) - You may have little or no difficulty following one-to-one conversation in a quiet room, but are likely to have problems listening in group situations or background noise.
- **Moderate** (41-70 dB) - You may experience difficulties following conversation, even in ideal situations or with minimal background noise.
- **Severe** (71-95 dB) - You may find it hard to hear speech at a normal conversational level, and may well appear to be ignoring or not following communication.
- **Profound** (over 95 dB) – You are unlikely to hear speech without hearing aids and will usually rely heavily on lip reading and/or signing language.

If you have any further questions, please contact:

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

If you would like this leaflet in other languages or formats (e.g. large print, Braille or audio), please contact the Audiology Department.

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