

WORLD HEARING DAY & ALL ABOUT HEARING LOSS

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Category: [Opinion](#)

[World Hearing Day](#) is held on 3rd March every year to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness and promote ear and hearing care across the world. 466 Million live with hearing loss worldwide (which is 5% of world's population) and 63 million suffer in India. Nation-wide disability surveys have estimated hearing loss to be the second most common cause of disability.

How do we hear? Our Ear is divided into 3 parts. Outer, middle and inner Ear. Sound passes through the Outer ear and causes vibrations over the tympanic membrane (Ear drum). The ear drum and ossicles (3 tiny bones in the middle ear) amplify these vibrations as they travel to the inner ear. There these vibrations pass through fluid in a snail like structure in the inner ear called as cochlea. Attached to the nerve cells in the cochlea are thousands of tiny hairs that help translate sound vibrations into electrical signals that are transmitted to our brain. Our brain turns these signals into sounds. Damage/ Obstruction anywhere in these parts will cause hearing loss. Even a simple Ear wax can block the conduction of these sound waves and cause hearing loss.

Causes of hearing loss:

1. Genetic causes- Gene mutations can cause hearing loss. 50-60% cause of hearing loss in babies is due to genetic causes. Some gene mutations run in families.

2. Chronic ear infections- Discharge from ear can cause damage to Tympanic membrane and Ossicles.
3. Infectious diseases- Can cause nerve damage and cause sensorineural loss.
4. Medications- Certain types of medications may cause hearing loss.
5. Loud noise- we all live in a noisy world. Listening to loud music, use of headphones for a longer duration, working in a noisy workplace can all cause hearing loss.
6. Ageing- We all lose some of our hearing as we age. It is called as presbycusis.
7. Sudden hearing loss can be due to trauma & viral infections.
8. Complications during birth can cause damage to the nerves.
9. Metabolic & endocrine disorders- like Diabetes, Thyroid dysfunction, Renal failure etc.
10. Barotrauma- due to airplane flights and diving.

Hearing loss can be Conductive type (when it involves outer and middle ear), Sensorineural type (when it involves inner ear) or Mixed hearing loss (conductive & sensorineural both). It can be Congenital or Acquired.

60% of childhood hearing loss is due to preventable causes.

Hearing loss can be Mild, Moderate, Severe or Profound. Detection of hearing loss is necessary. It can be detected immediately after birth. Every child should be screened for hearing loss. It is easy and not painful. If detected early patient can benefit from early identification; use of hearing aids; cochlear implants and other assistive devices; captioning and sign language; and other forms of educational and social support.

Adults should get examined at the earliest if they experience the following:

- If they frequently need to ask others to speak more slowly, clearly and loudly.
- If they need to turn up the volume of TV or radio.
- If they face difficulty in understanding words especially in noisy background or in crowd.
- If you face hearing loss immediately consult an ENT surgeon. They will do the Physical examination and some Tests to diagnose the type and severity of hearing loss.

Treatment includes:

- Wax removal to clear the blockage.

- Surgical procedures to treat the abnormalities of the ear drum or ossicles.
- Hearing aids amplify the sounds.
- Cochlear Implants bypass the damaged inner ear and directly stimulate the hearing nerve.

Preventive measures to avoid hearing loss:

- Avoid exposure to loud sounds.
- Avoid listening to music through headphones or earphones for a longer time.
- Use ear plugs in noisy places.
- Avoid putting any object in your ear.
- Avoid instilling any kind of fluid in ear.
- Use ear drops only if ENT surgeon has prescribed. Unnecessary use can cause nerve damage.
- Get wax removed only through an ENT surgeon.
- Get your hearing tested regularly.

“The thing about hearing loss is that no one can see it. Most people are so impatient; they just assume that the person with hearing loss is being rude, or slow-witted.”

– Marion Ross.

About the Author:



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