

Hearing

Many of us take our ability to communicate for granted. Yet the ability to speak, hear and be heard is much more vital to our everyday lives than most of us realize. Each year, Speech-Language & Audiology Canada dedicates the month of May to raising public awareness about communication disorders and the professionals who can help.

Common Hearing & Other Auditory Disorders:

Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is a partial or total inability to hear. The severity of the hearing impairment can range from mild to profound and can be in one or both ears. There are different types of hearing loss, which are caused by problems in different parts of the outer, middle and inner ear as well as the hearing nerve. Hearing loss can be caused by the natural aging process, excessive exposure to noise, head trauma, a history of ear infections or hereditary factors.

Auditory Processing Disorder

Auditory processing disorder (or APD) is a disorder that affects the way the brain processes sound — in other words, what the brain does with what the ear hears. Some symptoms of APD include poor listening, trouble following directions, short attention span and difficulty reading. People with APD can have normal hearing and APD is not related to intelligence.

Tinnitus

Tinnitus (TIN-A-TUS) refers to “ringing in the ears” when no other sound is present. Tinnitus can sound like hissing, roaring, pulsing, whooshing, chirping, whistling or clicking. Tinnitus can occur in one ear or both ears and while tinnitus is often associated with hearing loss, people with normal hearing can also have it. Sometimes the sounds are accompanied by pressure or pain in or around the ear or by a painful sensitivity to sounds. The impact of tinnitus ranges from annoying to debilitating.

Hyperacusis

Hyperacusis is a health condition characterized by an over-sensitivity to certain sounds. A person with severe hyperacusis has difficulty tolerating everyday sounds, some of which may seem unpleasantly loud to that person but not to other people. Although all sounds may be perceived as too loud, high frequency (pitch) sounds may be particularly troublesome.

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Speech-Language &
Audiology Canada
Communicating care

An estimated

19% of Canadian adults have at least mild hearing loss in the speech frequency range.

TIPS for talking with someone who has a hearing disorder:

- Get the person's attention by saying their name or touching their arm before you start talking.
- Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, but do NOT shout. Shouting distorts the speech sounds.
- Be patient and provide the person with some extra time to respond. Hearing and processing sounds may take a bit longer.
- Avoid putting anything around your face and mouth when you are speaking (e.g., pens, phones, hands). People with hearing loss use visual cues to help them understand the message. People without hearing loss also use visual cues!
- Create an ideal listening environment: move away from noise sources and choose a place with good lighting.
- Position yourself across from the listener rather than beside. Look at the person when talking.
- During group discussions only one person should speak at a time.
- Smaller group discussions are ideal. Listening in a large group setting can be difficult.

AUDIOLOGISTS are highly-trained hearing health professionals who identify, assess and manage individuals with hearing and balance disorders as well as other auditory disorders.