

Hearing problems in children

What can cause hearing problems?

Your child may be born with a hearing problem, which can be hereditary or could have been caused by an infection such as rubella during pregnancy. The most common cause of hearing problems is a 'glue ear', which is a build-up of sticky fluid in the middle ear following middle ear infections.

The outer ear can get blocked with things such as wax and foreign objects put in there by the child.

How might I know my child is deaf?

Your child may not respond in an expected way to sounds, especially to your voice. Deaf children do not respond to normal conversation or to the television, even if it is turned up loud.

Deafness could show up as unusual problems such as poor speech, disobedience and other behavioural problems and learning problems at school. The kindergarten or school teacher may pick up the problem.

What are the early signs of normal hearing?

The following stages at various ages are useful guides:

- *1 month*: should notice sudden constant sounds (e.g. car motor, vacuum cleaner) by pausing and listening.
- *3 months*: should respond to loud noise (e.g. will stop crying when hands are clapped).
- *4 months*: should turn head to look for source of sound such as mother speaking behind the child.
- *7 months*: should turn instantly to voices or even to quiet noises made across the room.
- *10 months*: should listen out for familiar everyday sounds.
- *12 months*: should show some response to familiar words and commands, including his or her name.

Can hearing tests be done on babies?

Yes. Hearing can be tested at any age. No baby is too young to be tested, and this includes the newborn. If you have any concerns, contact your family doctor, who can arrange a hearing test at an acoustic laboratory. It is most important to diagnose a hearing problem as early as possible. Do not put it off. The best time to screen is by 8 months and certainly before 10 months. Nowadays most centres aim to diagnose hearing loss at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

Are hearing tests complex?

No; the tests are quite simple. They are not uncomfortable and, as you can imagine, the audiologists are very experienced in dealing with children and getting accurate results.

Remember

- Hearing problems are common in children.
- Children are normally born with hearing.
- However, some are born with deafness.
- The earlier deafness is detected the better.
- The first 12 months are critical for diagnosis and treatment.
- The most common cause of hearing difficulties is ear infection leading to 'glue ear'.
- Deafness can cause learning problems at school, poor speech and behaviour problems.
- Any speech or language delay requires investigation.
- Hearing tests are easy to do at any age.
- Hearing aids are required by 12 months to be effective.