

# Hearing Tests: What to Expect

**H**earing is one of the most important senses that we use, especially when we monitor our environments for safety and security. Hearing also is linked directly to speech. Without effective use of hearing, people may become isolated and their quality of life may be compromised. Therefore, hearing tests and other ear-related tests routinely are used to measure how well a person performs in comparison to others. An audiologist administers these tests.

## What happens during a hearing test?

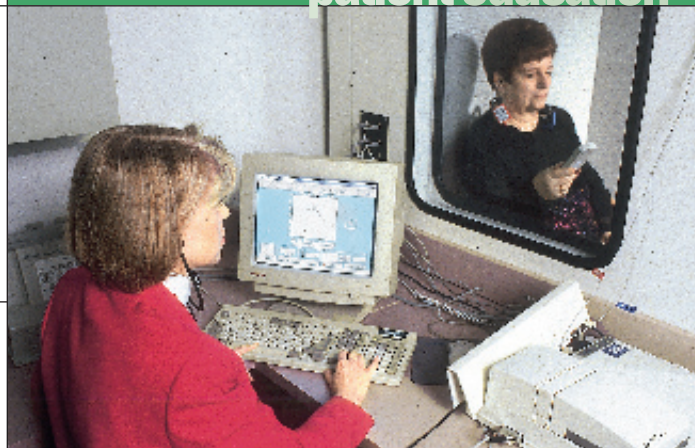
When a person is examined by an audiologist, more than hearing is evaluated. First, a case history is taken to help describe a person's general health and specific information concerning a person's hearing history. Then, a physical examination of the ear determines if there are anatomical problems. Next, a group of routine tests is used to compare hearing ability and ear function to that of other people in the same age group. Basic tests can be classified as participation tests and non-participation tests, and sometimes advanced tests are required.

## What basic participation hearing tests are given?

One of the most fundamental participation tests is pure-tone audiometry, where a headset is placed over the head with earphones for each ear. The patient listens to beeps, known as pure-tone sounds, and responds if and when a sound is heard. Next, the audiologist uses complex sounds and speech and asks the patient to repeat a series of words. When young children are tested, it may be necessary to engage the child in a form of playful activity, which is referred to as play-audiometry, in order to determine how well a child hears and uses sounds.

## What basic non-participation tests are given?

Non-participation tests only require the patient to follow simple instructions. Information about the ear and hearing system is collected using technology, such as an acoustic immittance test. This test measures information about the eardrum, the status of the middle ear (for example, if there is a presence of unwanted middle ear fluid), and the functioning of the bones



TEST RESULTS: Hearing tests can improve your life.

in the middle ear. Other advanced non-participation tests are sometimes used to measure and assess how well the ear and balance system are functioning.

## What advanced tests may be given?

When an audiologist suspects a hearing or ear problem, it may be necessary to use advanced tests to determine the nature and degree of the problems affecting the hearing system. These tests measure the functioning of the ear when neural problems need to be evaluated. Advanced tests are often used with people who have difficulty with tests requiring participation. Advanced tests may include:

- **Auditory Evoked Potentials:** This is a non-participation test where an audiologist places small electrodes on the head or ear in order to detect responses when the ear is exposed to sounds. Two specific tests are called Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) and Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE).
- **Electronystagmography (ENG):** In this non-participation test the patient is asked to follow a few simple tasks. The test utilizes the visual system, inner ear and muscles to measure and assess normal balance functioning and to locate any problems.

## Why should I get a hearing test?

Without the effective use of your sensory systems, you may become isolated and your quality of life may be compromised. If you suspect you have a hearing, ear or balance problem, contact both a physician and an audiologist for examinations. The audiologist will administer painless tests that measure your hearing, ears and/or balance functioning, and the test results can be used to improve your life.

## more info

Web MD,  
[www.webmd.com/hw/health\\_guide\\_atoz/tv8475.asp](http://www.webmd.com/hw/health_guide_atoz/tv8475.asp)

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association,  
[www.asha.org/public/hearing/testing/assess.htm](http://www.asha.org/public/hearing/testing/assess.htm)

American Academy of Audiology,  
[www.audiology.org/about/audiology/consumer/guides/quicktest.htm](http://www.audiology.org/about/audiology/consumer/guides/quicktest.htm)

