

Adult Hearing Testing

There are about 28 million people in the United States who have some degree of hearing loss. Some studies report that more than 54 percent of adults over the age of 65 have significant hearing loss.¹

People who suspect that they have a hearing loss should visit an audiologist. Audiologists perform hearing evaluations to determine the presence or absence of hearing loss. They work with physicians to help ensure that, like most other medically-related test results, patients receive coordinated care.

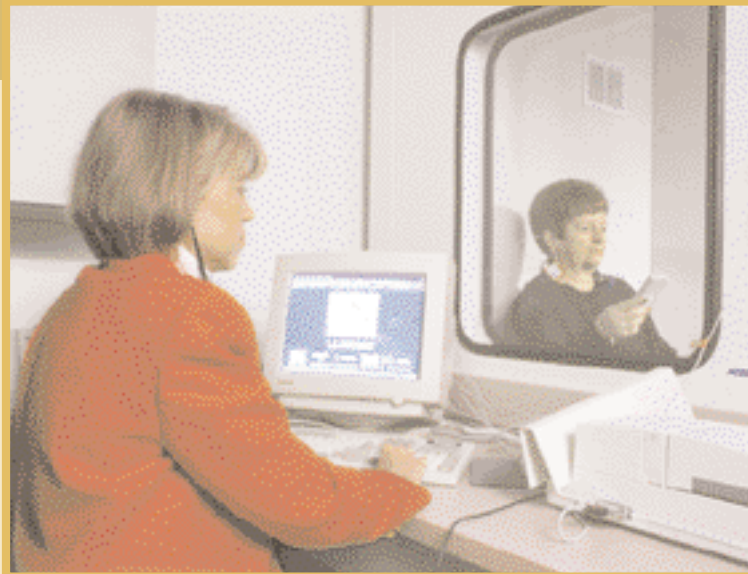
How Is Hearing Tested?

A person's hearing may be screened or tested. One type of assessment is pure-tone (beep) testing, which is completed while the patient wears a headset. The pure-tone sounds range from those that are easily heard to those that are very difficult to hear. A person listens to the sounds and then makes an appropriate response (like pushing a hand-held button) to indicate that the sound was heard. This test is painless.

Speech is also frequently used to test for hearing loss, and is tested at very soft levels and at levels where speech conversation normally occurs. This test is painless.

Audiologists also may administer immittance, or impedance audiometry. This test sends a sound into the ear using a small soft earplug (probe) with a little speaker.

The probe is inserted into the outer part of the



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ear canal. Sounds that are reflected back to the inserted probe, which has a microphone, are then fed into a computer for analysis. The test may range from painless to uncomfortable, depending upon how sensitive a person is to having a small probe inserted into the ear.¹⁻⁴

Specialized tests that audiologists might use to explore why a person has lost his or her hearing include auditory brainstem response (ABR), electrocochleography (ECoG), and otoacoustic emissions (OAEs). These tests help the audiologist to examine the electrical (neural) pathways in the ear and may range from painless to uncomfortable, depending upon how sensitive a person is to the use of several different types of electrodes.¹

If Hearing Loss Is Detected

If the hearing loss is not resolved by medical or surgical treatment, possible solutions depend upon the degree of loss and the cause of the loss and are indicated as follows:

Solution #1: For mild hearing loss, an audiologist may recommend listening strategies to help the person take advantage of his remaining hearing.

Solution #2: For moderate hearing loss, an audiologist may recommend #1 and also may recommend a personal hearing aid and/or an assistive listening device. Assistive listening devices can help people hear while using the telephone or when listening to the television.

Solution #3: For severe hearing loss, an audiologist may recommend #1 and #2 and also may recommend aural rehabilitation. This involves working with a teacher of the hearing impaired who helps people regain hearing and visual strategies to improve communication.

References

1. Listen for Life Center at Virginia Mason. Adult Hearing Evaluations. Accessed via www.vmmc.org/db/Listen/sec395.htm
2. Baylor College of Medicine, Bobby R. Alford Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Communicative Sciences. Sensorineural hearing loss in adults. Accessed via www.bcm.tmc.edu/oto/otologyprimer/hl/adulthl.html
3. Go60.com. When Should Hearing Be Tested? Accessed via www.go60.com/hearing-test.html
4. Medical Center of Central Georgia, The Medical Center Online. Types of Hearing Loss. Accessed via www.mccg.org/childrenshealth/ent/hrtest.asp

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For More Information

Self-Help for Hard of Hearing People Inc.:
www.shhh.org

Self-Help Groups for Hearing and
Balance Disorders:
www.asha.org/public/outreach/hearing-web/hear_self-help.htm

Hearing Impairment Resources:
www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/hrginfo.html

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing:
www.agbell.org