

Treatment Options for Conductive Hearing Loss

Conductive hearing loss can be much easier to remedy than other types of hearing loss and often is treatable through medical or surgical intervention. Patients experiencing conductive loss have a number of treatment options depending on the nature and origin of their difficulty.

However, it is critical that a complete hearing health care team of professionals, including an audiologist and physician, participates in the assessment and treatment process.

Defining the Causes

Conductive hearing loss is caused by a blockage that prevents the conduction of sound from the outer to inner ear. Because this condition is not caused by nerve damage, as is the case with sensorineural loss, it usually is treatable by removing the blockage.

Ear infections, as well as impacted ear wax—known as cerumen—are the most common causes of this type of hearing loss. Children and infants especially are susceptible to middle ear infections, which affect 70 percent of young children.¹ If you allow these infections to go untreated or occur chronically, permanent impairment may result.

Other causes include difficulties in the eardrums, Eustachian tubes, or various bones of the ear; prolonged exposure to certain drugs; tumor formation; random injury; and trauma. The specific details of each case determine the treatment of choice—which is why proper diagnosis is so important.

Treatment Options

Ear infections, such as otitis media with effusion—one of the most common conductive hearing losses—can be treated with oral antibiotics or eardrops. In some cases, fluid behind the eardrum can be drained by inserting pressure-equalizing tympanotomy tubes through the eardrum, a procedure commonly known as “tubes in the ears.” Ruptured eardrums also can be treated with antibiotics or surgery if necessary.²

In cases involving bones of the ear, surgery may be necessary in repairing, replacing, or removing that which causes the hearing loss. For instance, otosclerosis, a condition in which the ossicles of the middle ear become immobile



PHOTO/COURTESY PHONAK

For More Information

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
www.asha.org

A.G. Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
www.agbell.org

Audiology Awareness Campaign
www.audiologyawareness.com

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

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov

because of growth of the surrounding bone, can be treated by a stapedectomy. This procedure involves the replacement of the tiny, damaged bones with metal substitutes.^{2,3}

When surgical or medicinal treatments are unable to foster improvement in patients who suffer conductive hearing loss, hearing aids can be very helpful. Here again, a team approach should be taken. This includes the management of the condition by a physician and the identification, description, and management of the communication consequences by an audiologist.

References

1. HealthAtoZ.com. (2001). Causes and Risk Factors of Hearing Loss, accessed via www.healthatoz.com/atoz/hearingloss/hlcause.asp
2. HealthAtoZ.com. (2001). Medical Treatments for Hearing Loss, accessed via www.healthatoz.com/atoz/hearingloss/hltreat.asp
3. BUPA, The Personal Health Care Service. (2000). Hearing Loss, accessed via http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/Mosby_factsheets/Hearing_Loss.html

Compiled by Kerri Waldowski

SHARE THIS COLUMN WITH YOUR PATIENTS