

When to See an Audiologist

Hearing loss is the third most common health problem in the United States, the number one birth defect, and the number one reported work-related injury. Despite this, many people don't understand when to see an audiologist.

It's not always easy to tell when to see an audiologist, below are key signs that you need to make an appointment with your hearing health provider.

When to See an Audiologist

Checkup: A yearly checkup for your ears is as important as a checkup for your eyes. And like when you check your eyes, you have a more complete evaluation if you see a hearing health provider like an audiologist. An audiologist has the training and equipment best needed to identify the nuanced ranges of hearing loss.

Excessive Earwax: Earwax is beneficial. It is self-cleaning, protects the inner ear, moisturizes the ear canal and has anti-biotic properties, i.e. germs don't get through. Believe it or not, there are very few times when a person should attempt to clean the wax from their ears. That's because many of the products on the market today can cause more damage than good. Cotton swabs, ear candling, and irrigators are all examples of devices people use to clean the wax that can cause the wax to become more imbedded. If you have excessive earwax make an appointment with your audiologist to have it properly removed or see an ENT.

Tinnitus: 26 million Americans suffer from a condition called tinnitus, a buzzing, whistling, whining, or screeching noise in head or ears when there is no corresponding noise present. In many cases this condition is a symptom of a bigger problem, like hearing loss, and correcting this underlying issue can help to alleviate the symptom. It seems counterintuitive, but studies confirm that in many cases tinnitus is a symptom of hearing loss and using a hearing aid to increase hearing can and does help relieve the phantom noises.

Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss: Trauma to the ear, recent plane travel, or other physical causes like sneezing are just some of the ways that sudden sensorineural hearing loss happens. But sudden hearing loss doesn't always have a direct link to physical pain and suffering. If it occurs without pain, it can seem less like the emergency and more like a temporary problem. But sudden hearing loss is always an emergency and people who experience it need to see an audiologist right away.

Signs of Hearing Loss: Recognizing the signs of hearing loss isn't always easy. Silence is less abrasive the sound, so recognizing the varying levels of hearing loss can be a challenge. Having regular checkups is one way to make sure that your hearing is healthy, but these other signs should serve as signals for people to see their hearing health provider:

- **Inability to Hear Female or Child Voices--**Females and children speak in a higher register, so one of the first signs of hearing loss is the inability to hear these higher pitched voices.

- **Television Volume**--Needing to turn the television up louder than others say is comfortable can be a sign of hearing loss.
- **Inability to Hear High-Pitched Sounds**--A phone ringing, a child's cry, the trill of a bird are all high-pitched sounds that can begin to fade as a person develops hearing loss.
- **Asking to Have Things Repeated**--Having to frequently ask people to repeat things means it is time to see an audiologist.
- **Inability to Understand in Crowds**--Not being able to hear what people are saying in a crowded restaurant or room is one of the most frustrating things about hearing loss. It is also why many people begin to avoid socializing. This withdraw can lead to depression and isolation.
- **Depression**--Hearing loss that goes unrecognized can cause other symptoms like depression. If you feel isolated and are depressed, having your ears checked is a good idea.
- **Avoidance**: Do you find yourself making excuses to avoid going to a public place? Does the idea of going out make you anxious? Often people don't pursue these feelings, assuming they are emotional, but in fact they can be the first signs that you are uncomfortable communicating with others due to hearing loss. Hearing loss is more pronounced in social situations where there is an increase in background noise.