

Fact Sheet

Deaf in One Ear: Babies and Preschool Children



Many infants who are deaf in one ear are now identified in the first few months of life by the newborn hearing screening program (SWISH). If your child has had a 'refer' result in one ear through the newborn hearing screening program your child should have a hearing test arranged by the SWISH co-ordinator in your area. If the repeat hearing screen does not show a clear result, your baby will be referred for a diagnostic hearing test by an audiologist. Although babies' hearing is usually tested at birth, it is still possible for a young child to go deaf in one (or both) ears later on.

About 1 baby in every 500 births will have a hearing loss in one ear.

Children who are deaf in one ear should be assessed by an audiologist (a person who tests hearing) and an Ear Nose and Throat Specialist doctor, to make sure if anything can be done to correct the deafness.

Hearing testing for older babies and preschoolers can be arranged at:

- Australian Hearing branches- phone the Help Line on 13 17 97.
- Some Community Health Centres.
- Some Ear Nose and Throat Specialists' rooms.
- Some Audiology Units at hospitals or special centres.

Ask your family doctor to refer your child to an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist Doctor (ENT) for a proper medical check on both ears.

What could I notice at home?

- Most parents will not notice any problems with their baby's hearing in the first few months of life as babies are often in a quiet area and held close when spoken to.
- As your baby starts to walk and explore their surroundings he/she may have difficulty hearing you from another room or in a noisy room.

- Your child may find it hard to hear you talk when you are driving and they cannot see your face.
- If these children get a cold and have temporary blocking in the other, "good" ear, they can miss a lot of what is said to them.
- The child who is deaf in one ear will often have trouble in picking the direction from which sounds are coming. Because they will hear everything better in the good ear, all sounds will seem to be coming from that side. That is another reason why children can seem very inconsistent in their response to voices and other sounds.

Some parents, teachers and doctors think that a child who is deaf in one ear will not have any problems at home or at school because the other ear is normal. This can be wrong. Although some of these children have no real problems others certainly do. It is important to get information about support for your baby and how to protect the good ear.

Research which followed up school aged children with one deaf ear found that **some** of them had problems with:

- Learning to read.
- Spelling and writing stories.
- Doing maths.

Parents should take comfort from the fact that not all of these children have problems and following the steps described below can prevent or lessen any problems that do occur.

My child is deaf in one ear - How can I help?

- When you want your child to listen to you, try a quiet place and keep away from noises so he/she can hear you better.
- Position your baby with the hearing ear directed toward the sound you want him/her to hear.

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- When feeding your baby try to keep the hearing ear exposed to sound.
- Stay close when talking to your baby or toddler, but don't yell. Being closer will make your speech louder for them. You may need to be even closer in a noisy room.
- Make sure your child can see you when you are talking to them, so they can see your lips and gestures. You may need to turn the lights on.
- Repeat and emphasise any key words when talking to your baby.
- Discuss with Australian Hearing whether there is special equipment that might help your child hear sounds (eg CROS hearing aids or sound field systems).
- Attend a regular hearing check at Australian Hearing (or another Audiology Unit) so that you find out quickly if there is any change in the hearing ear.
- It is important to get treatment quickly for ear infections that will make your baby's hearing worse.
- The hearing in your child's "good ear" is very precious. If an operation is advised for that ear, make sure that you understand why it is really needed and ask for expert paediatric E.N.T. specialist care.
- As your baby grows up be aware of safety, as your child may not hear warning sounds as easily.

Will the other ear go deaf?

We know that some children who are deaf in one ear will develop some hearing loss in the other, "good" ear. In one small research study, 1 out of 7 children who were deaf in one ear had a drop in their hearing in that ear over

time. If you have any concerns about your baby's hearing getting worse then you should see your audiologist straight away. If the hearing is worse then you should see your ENT specialist or family doctor as soon as possible.

What about other education services?

Some children may need extra support for language and learning even before school. If you have any concerns about your child's speech or understanding, or would like further information or guidance about your child's progress then you could contact a service that provides early help for children who are deaf. These services are:

- Catholic Centre for Hearing Impaired Students.
- NSW Department of Education & Training.
- Hear the Children St Gabriel's.
- Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.
- The Shepherd Centre.

Remember

- See your doctor quickly for ear infections that will make your child's hearing worse. If he or she is hearing badly there may be blocking or infection in the "good ear".
- Your baby and toddler may have trouble hearing sounds from a distance and also in noisy places.
- Make sure you have your baby or toddler's attention before talking to them.
- Your baby needs regular hearing checks. If you are concerned that the hearing is worse contact your audiologist and doctor straight away.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.

Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on Monday 29th September, 2008.

the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

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CHILDREN'S
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