

Types of Hearing Loss

There are three types of hearing loss: conductive hearing loss, sensorineural hearing loss and mixed hearing loss. Each of these types can be described by which part of the auditory system is affected.

Conductive Hearing Loss

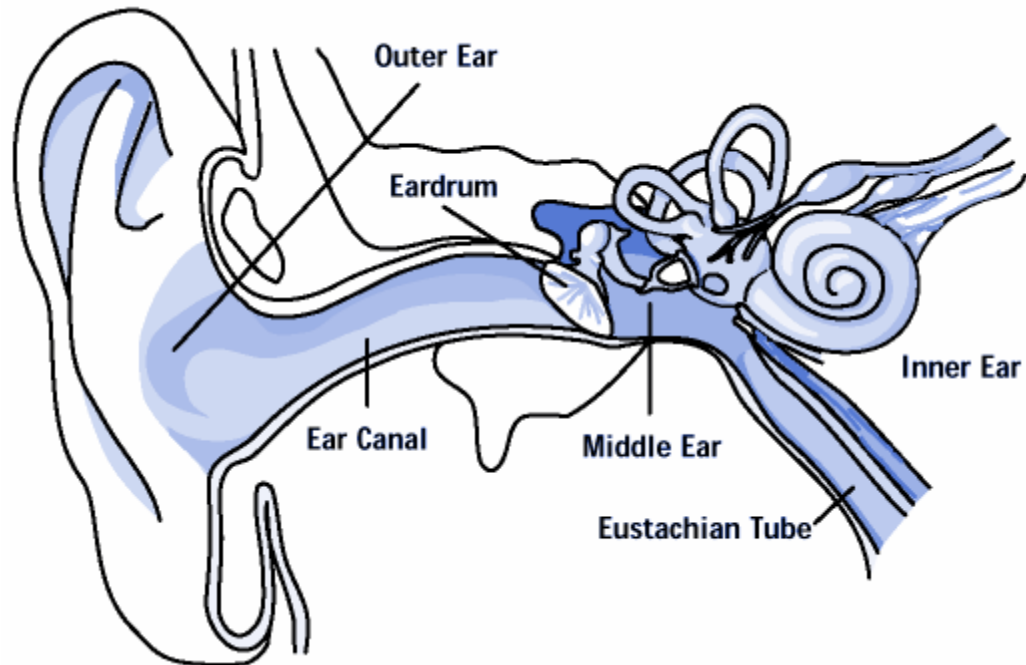
Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound is not sufficiently transmitted through the outer or middle ear. Conductive hearing loss usually involves a reduction in sound level, or in the ability to hear faint sounds. Often times this type of hearing loss can be medically or surgically corrected. Examples of conditions that may cause a conductive hearing loss include: fluid in the middle ear, overproduction of earwax, ear infections (otitis media), or a perforated eardrum.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss

Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the inner ear (cochlea) or to the nerve pathways from the inner ear (retrocochlear) to the brain. Sensorineural hearing loss not only involves a reduction in sound level, or ability to hear faint sounds, but also affects speech understanding, or ability to hear clearly. Examples of causes of sensorineural hearing loss are: natural aging process, diseases, excessive exposure to noise, viruses, and head trauma.

Mixed Hearing Loss

Sometimes a conductive and sensorineural hearing loss occur simultaneously resulting in a mixed hearing loss. In other words, there may be damage in the outer or middle ear and as well as the inner ear (cochlea) or auditory nerve.



Degrees of Hearing Loss

Mild hearing loss- Unable to hear soft sounds and difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments.

Moderate loss- Unable to hear soft and moderately loud sounds, considerable difficulty in understanding speech, particularly with background noise.

Severe loss- Unable to hear most sounds and group conversation is possible only with considerable effort and visual cues.

Profound loss- Some very loud sounds are audible, but communication without a hearing instrument or through sign language is very difficult.