

ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

Sudden Hearing Loss

You wake up one morning and have hearing loss in one ear; or, over the course of a few hours, you notice a rapid deterioration of hearing in one ear. Both instances are prime examples of a rapid loss of hearing called Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss or SSHL.

SSHL is the result of damage to the cochlea (inner ear) or auditory nerve and in almost all cases affects only one ear. While relatively rare, SSHL affects one in every 10,000 individuals annually. It occurs equally in men and women and is occasionally accompanied by vertigo (dizziness) and tinnitus (a whooshing or ringing sound in the ear).

Sensorineural hearing loss often called nerve deafness is different from conductive hearing loss, in which sound does not stimulate the inner ear by a physical impediment such as earwax, fluid in the middle ear, or a perforated eardrum.

What causes SSHL? In most instances, the specific cause is never determined. However, sometimes bacterial and viral infections, such as meningitis, rubella, influenza, and herpes simplex cause it. It may also be the result of a temporal bone fracture, trauma to the ear, a side effect of some medications, or restriction of blood supply to the cochlea.

Approximately 65 percent of SSHL victims experience partial to complete recovery of their hearing. The sooner they seek treatment the better their chance for recovery. If you experience sudden hearing loss, see your physician immediately.

If you have concerns about your hearing, consult an ear, nose, and throat specialist and audiologist.



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