

# What to do if you have a sudden change in hearing

Audiology

Patient information

Please bring this information with you to your GP or A&E and show it to them.

## What is this information about?

This information is about what to do if you have a sudden change in your hearing.

It may be a Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss or SSNHL.

It is very important that you get a GP appointment in the next 24 hours.

**Do not wait to see if the hearing loss gets better on its own. It is a medical emergency and there is a risk it can be permanent.**

## What is SSNHL?

SSNHL is a hearing loss affecting the inner ear (see diagram below). The cause may not be clear. There are often no other symptoms.

**SSNHL can be caused by one of the following:**

- A viral infection infecting the cochlea.
- A change in the blood supply to cochlea.
- An autoimmune reaction.

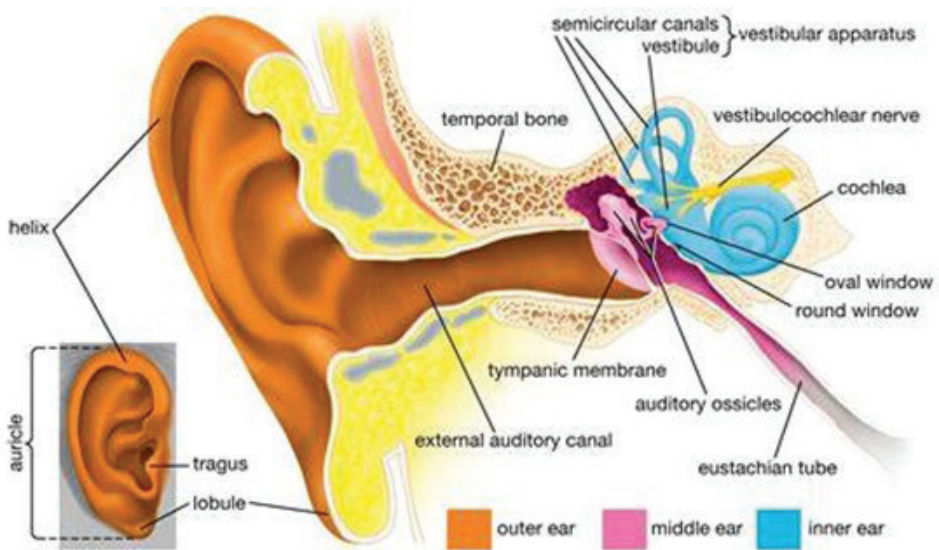


Diagram of the inner ear. From [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)

## Why do I need treatment urgently?

If the cause of your sudden change in hearing comes from your inner ear (SSNHL), there is a chance it could be permanent.

Treatment with steroids, prescribed by a GP, A&E or ENT (ear, nose and throat) doctor reduces the risk of the hearing loss being permanent.

Your GP or A&E will **perform a simple test** for SSNHL and explain the benefits and risks of treatment **while** assessing if the treatment is suitable for you.

## What are the other possible causes for a sudden change in hearing?

There are other causes of hearing loss that aren't sensori-neural and are not urgent. These include:

- A build-up of ear wax.
- An outer ear infection.
- Middle ear effusion or congestion, also called glue ear.

But even if it looks as if your hearing loss is caused by ear wax, we need to test to make sure that it is just the wax that is causing the problem. If you already have an existing severe-profound hearing loss, the wax needs to be removed before we test to work out why you have lost your hearing.

## If I have SSNHL, will my hearing come back?

If you have treatment for SSNHL within 72 hours, your chance of recovery is improved.

You can still get treatment two weeks to a month after the SSNHL first started, although the treatment might not work as well.

## Where can I get further advice and support?

Sudden hearing loss can be very frightening. It is a hidden disability and often under-estimated.

If you are diagnosed with SSNHL, our hearing therapy team can offer support. You can request a referral from your GP and ENT department.

## ENT flowchart for GPs, A&E and ENT clinicians



This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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