

Unilateral Hearing Loss

Did you know that you can have hearing loss in only one ear? This is called *unilateral hearing loss* (UHL). This hearing loss can be a small loss or a complete loss of hearing. A UHL can occur at any age. Causes of UHL may include

- exposure to loud noise;
- head injury;
- hearing loss that runs in the family (genetic or hereditary);
- illness or infection; and
- some syndromes.

UHL is difficult to diagnose because there is normal hearing in one ear. It may be hard to notice that a person has problems hearing in the other ear. People with UHL may

- appear easily distracted;
- ask to have things repeated;
- get easily frustrated;
- respond incorrectly to questions or requests; and/or
- seem overly tired at the end of the day.

Talk to an audiologist if you notice these problems in yourself or your loved one.

Why should I seek help if I have one normal-hearing ear?

Addressing UHL enables hearing in both ears. The benefits to hearing with two ears include

- improved sound localization, which means finding where sounds are coming from;
- improved hearing in noisy environments; and
- better hearing overall.

Will a hearing aid help?

The recommended device will depend on the amount and type of hearing loss that is present.

Some people with UHL benefit from using a traditional hearing aid. Others benefit from a

device that looks similar to a hearing aid. This is called a *CROS system*. If a person has a complete loss of hearing in one ear the person may benefit from using a cochlear implant or a bone conduction device.

Talk with your audiologist about hearing technologies that may help you.

Your audiologist may refer you to an ear, nose, and throat doctor, who can discuss surgical options that may help you manage your UHL.

How can I help protect my hearing?

Loud sounds or ear infections can cause additional hearing loss to individuals with UHL. Remember to

- wear properly fitting earplugs or earmuffs when in noisy environments;
- turn down the volume on the TV and radio; and
- talk to your doctor if you are concerned about an ear infection.

For monitoring purposes, individuals with UHL have an audiologist regularly check their hearing.

How can I help someone with a UHL?

- Do not talk to them from another room.
- Get their attention before speaking.
- Limit background noise—such as the dishwasher, window air conditioner, fan, TV, or radio—when talking.
- Speak face-to-face. When that is not possible, speak into the better-hearing ear.

Content contributed by ASHA member Maria Pomponio, AuD, CCC-A.

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Notes:

For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit www.asha.org/aud/pei/.

For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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