

THROUGH THE EARS

HEARING LOSS CAN OCCUR ANYTIME, EVEN TO A YOUNG ADULT.

We are born with about 16,000 hearing cells. Once they are permanently damaged, they are lost forever. The leading cause of hearing loss is ageing, usually after 50. However, increasingly noisy lifestyles have led to a rise in noise-induced hearing loss among young adults. Over time, ear infections, eardrum perforations, barotrauma, middle ear and hearing nerve tumours, genetic and autoimmune conditions, drugs and chemoradiation toxicity further degrade hearing.

Many adults ignore their hearing loss as it can be subtle, starting with loss at a higher pitch of sound. They can hear, but cannot discriminate speech well, straining to hear, especially in daily noise situations. They complain about others mumbling, turn volumes up, and do not realise that ringing in the ears is a result of hearing loss. Treatment gets delayed for years.

Unfortunately, the brain adapts better to rehabilitation at early stages, and the hearing part of the brain shrinks with reduced stimulation. When aided later, the outcomes may not be as good.

In Singapore, one in five people in their 50s and two in five people in their 60s experience hearing loss. Those with atherosclerosis, diabetes and hypertension may also have reduced perfusion of the inner ear with increased risk of hearing loss. Besides poor communication, more misunderstandings and reduced job and socialisation options, it causes depression, increases falls, and is associated with a two- to four-fold increase of memory loss or dementia.

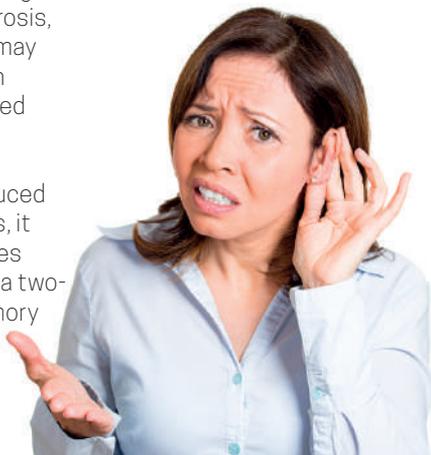
NOT JUST FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Teenagers abuse their ears with loud music, game arcades and movies. As the noise level can go up to 110dB, they risk hearing loss within 15 minutes! After clubbing, some may have deafness and ringing in the ears, which seem to improve the next day, but the recovery may only be partial. A proper hearing test by audiology professionals is needed to pick up mild hearing loss.

One-sided hearing loss is often ignored, as many are able to cope with one hearing ear. However, the auditory processing on one side of the brain slowly starts to lose function. When hearing in the good ear starts to fail and a rush is made to rehabilitate the non-hearing ear, the outcomes are inferior.

WAYS TO IMPROVE HEARING

Sophisticated and cosmetic hearing aids sufficiently amplify sound when loss is mild to moderate, but it is crucial to first exclude diseases needing treatment. The most cosmetic aid may not be powerful enough, and the most expensive aid may not be suitable. Surgeries to insert bone-anchored hearing or cochlear implants may be required when hearing aids do not suffice.



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Dr Lynne Lim Ear Nose Throat & Hearing Centre provides a wide range of treatments for ENT, and head and neck conditions in children and adults. It is headed by Senior Consultant Adjunct A/Prof Lynne Lim, a pioneer of several surgical treatments and services, and an active researcher and teacher at the National University of Singapore.

SERVICES

- Congenital ear conditions in children
- Ear infections and tumours
- Ringing in the ears
- Ear dizziness
- Eustachian tube dysfunction
- Age-related hearing loss
- Noise-induced hearing loss
- Cochlear and middle ear implants