

Hearing Loss, Tinnitus, and Aging

About one-third of Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have hearing problems. Difficulty with hearing can lead to miscommunication and confusion. Signs that one may have hearing loss include:

- Have trouble hearing over the telephone
- Find it hard to follow conversations when two or more people are talking
- Need to turn up the TV volume so loud that others complain
- Have a problem hearing because of background noise
- Sense that others seem to mumble
- Can't understand when children speak to you

Hearing loss can have many different causes, including the aging process, ear wax buildup, acute or chronic ear infections, exposure to very loud noises over a long period of time, viral or bacterial infections, heart conditions or stroke, head injuries, tumors, and certain medicines.

Tinnitus accompanies many forms of hearing loss, including those that sometimes come with aging. People with tinnitus may hear a ringing, roaring, or some other noise inside their ears. Tinnitus initially presents in quiet environments, and can often progress to being constant. There are many over-the-counter medications and devices for the treatment of tinnitus, though most are only partially if at all helpful. Typically, masking the "ringing" with a soft, background noise helps to control the symptom.

Evaluation for hearing loss requires examination by a physician or ear, nose, throat doctor. Additional testing including an audiogram (hearing test) may be obtained. Based on the results of the hearing test, type of hearing loss, as well degree of communication deficit, hearing aids may be recommended.