

It is estimated that the annual incidence of sudden sensorineural hearing loss is 1 in 5000 people or about 4000 new cases per year in the US.¹

Sudden sensorineural hearing loss is defined as a rapid onset of hearing loss over a 72-hour period. It usually occurs in one ear and can be associated with other symptoms such as dizziness and ringing in the ear (tinnitus). It can affect people at any age, but it is most common in adults between 50-60 years of age.² **Sudden sensorineural hearing loss is a serious condition and should be treated as a medical emergency.**

A comprehensive hearing test performed by an audiologist can help to diagnose sudden sensorineural hearing loss. In addition, a thorough work up performed by an Ear, Nose, and Throat physician is necessary. Further testing may include an MRI, blood tests, and balance tests.

Causes of sudden sensorineural hearing loss.

Ninety percent of sudden sensorineural hearing loss cases are idiopathic, meaning the cause is unknown. It is suspected that there may be an injury to the hearing organ (cochlea) that causes swelling or blockage of blood flow. Many cases of sudden sensorineural loss happen after a person has suffered from a viral or bacterial infection.¹

² Other reported causes of sudden sensorineural hearing loss include

autoimmune disease, lime disease, acoustic neuromas and multiple sclerosis.

Treatment of sudden sensorineural hearing loss

Medical treatment should be obtained as soon as possible to better the prognosis of sudden sensorineural hearing loss. The most common treatment is a course of corticosteroids such as oral prednisone and/or intra-tympanic steroid injections. The majority of people with sudden sensorineural hearing loss will recover some degree of the loss and small percentage of people will have symptoms that worsen.^{2,3}

After treatment, if hearing loss remains, then hearing aids, implantable devices and/or assistive listening technology can help manage the residual hearing loss.

If you suspect that you may have sudden sensorineural hearing loss, seek medical help right away.

The role of an audiologist

Audiologists identify and diagnose the type and degree of hearing loss and work closely with physicians as an important part of the management team.

Think you may have a hearing loss? Click on the Find an Audiologist link at www.audiology.org to locate and set up an appointment with an Audiologist in your area

References

Sudden Deafness NIH Pub. No. 00-4757 July 2013

Wazen and Ghossaini; Hearing Review, December 2003, Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss special issue;

Kuhnn et al; Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss; September 2011; A Review of Diagnosis, Treatment, and Prognosis.