

Different types of hearing loss

There are three main types of hearing loss:

- Sensorineural hearing loss;
- conductive hearing loss; and
- and mixed hearing loss.

1. Sensorineural Hearing Loss

“Sensorineural” means that this hearing loss has to do with the thousands of little nerves that are inside the cochlea, the receptor organ for hearing. When someone has sensorineural hearing loss, that means that some of these nerves are missing or damaged. These nerves take sound waves (vibrations in the air) and send it to the brain, so if they’re not completely working then some of that sound won’t be able to get to the brain. Depending on how many of the nerve cells aren’t working, the level of hearing loss can vary from very little to complete deafness.

Sensorineural hearing loss makes sounds seem quieter or fuzzy. It can affect all frequencies of sound or only some of them, so sometimes it can be difficult to tell if you have a hearing loss at all.

There are lots of reasons why sensorineural hearing loss happens. It can be present from birth, or it might happen at another time early or late in life. This can happen due to exposure to too much noise, smoking, some diseases, and even taking certain medications.

2. Conductive Hearing Loss

Conductive hearing loss is a hearing loss that happens when the nerve cells in the cochlea might work fine, but sound waves can’t get to the cochlea.

This is because their cochlea would be able to recognize sound vibrations, but something is blocking the sound waves and therefore these vibrations do not reach

the cochlea. Conductive hearing loss makes sounds seem as if the ear is plugged: sounds from the outside can be difficult to hear, but other sounds like your own voice or chewing on food can be heard just fine.

The blockage that causes a conductive hearing loss might be temporary or permanent, and the amount of hearing loss depends on what kind of blockage it is. Temporary causes can be ear infections, too much ear wax, or something stuck inside the ear canal, while other causes can be a hole in the ear drum or when the three little ear bones (called the hammer, anvil, and stirrup) cannot move.

3. Mixed Hearing Loss

Mixed hearing loss is exactly what it sounds like: a mix of different hearing losses, specifically sensorineural and conductive hearing losses. Therefore the reasons for a mixed hearing loss are a mix of the reasons for both sensorineural and conductive hearing loss.