

## Your hearing appointment – what you need to know

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### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net).

## Who will I see for my hearing test and how long will my appointment take?

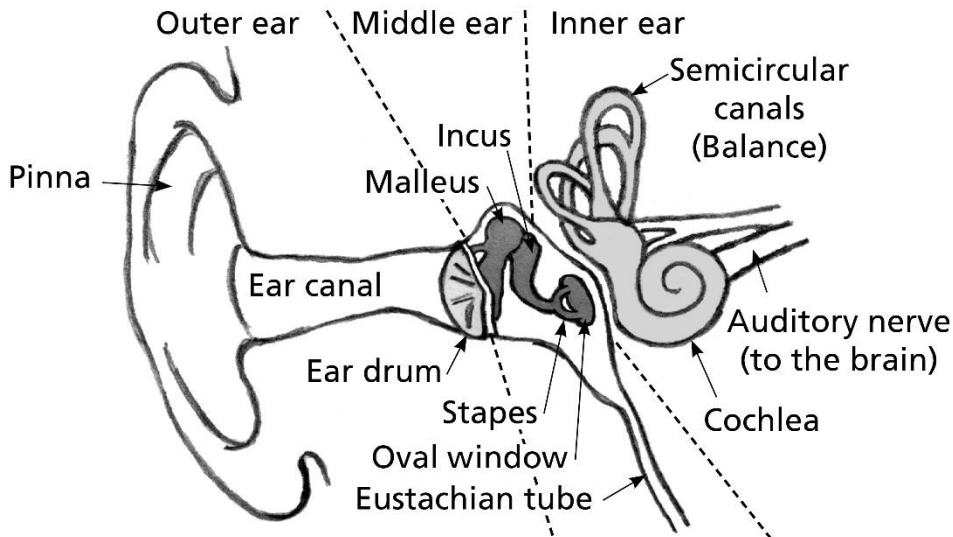
You will see a qualified audiologist and your first appointment will take between 60 to 90 minutes depending on whether hearing aids are required.

## Why do I need a hearing test?

Hearing tests are used to check for hearing impairment. As deterioration in hearing is usually a gradual process, you may not realise that you even have a hearing loss. There are many reasons why adults might lose their hearing other than natural degeneration, such as being exposed to loud noises for prolonged periods, ear infections or viruses, head injuries and family genetics.

The ears are highly-sensitive organs and are made up of three sections:

- The outer ear – the pinna and ear canal
- The middle ear – cavity, malleus, incus, stapes and Eustachian tube
- The inner ear – hearing and balance organs



Sounds enter the ear, traveling along the ear canal to the ear drum, which vibrates and allows sound to pass into the middle ear. The middle ear is an air-filled cavity, connected to the throat by the Eustachian tube and contains the three smallest bones (ossicles) in the body – the malleus, incus and stapes. They provide a mechanical link between the ear drum and inner ear. Sound travels across these bones to the inner ear which comprises the cochlea (a fluid-filled chamber that is responsible for hearing) and the semi-circular canals or vestibular system (which helps to control balance). The cochlea contains thousands of tiny sensory hair cells, which are stimulated and in turn activate the auditory nerve, which transmits sound to the brain.

For an ear to function properly, every stage in this pathway needs to be working. Hearing loss happens when at least one part of this system is not working properly.

## Types of hearing loss

Hearing loss can be conductive, sensorineural or mixed (conductive and sensorineural loss in the same ear)

### Conductive hearing loss

Many causes of conductive hearing loss are often temporary and possibly corrected by treatment:

- Build-up of ear wax or foreign body in the ear canal
- Perforation of ear drum
- Fluid in the middle ear
- Damage to the ossicles due to arthritis or trauma

### Sensorineural hearing loss

This type of hearing loss arises from disorders of the cochlea or somewhere along the auditory nerve. They are generally more permanent and can include:

- Congenital defects: problems that you are born with
- Prolonged / sudden exposure to very loud noise

- Menieres disease
- Toxic reaction to medication
- Deafness caused by nerve or brain damage, which may be due to an illness or head trauma

The most common type of sensorineural hearing loss is age-related and affects the higher pitches or frequencies of hearing. This can affect general conversation, particularly in background noise, the ability to hear the TV clearly and hearing on the telephone.

It is estimated that approximately 10 million people are deaf or hard of hearing in the UK. The number of people with hearing impairment is rising as the proportion of the population over 60 years increases.<sup>1</sup>

Once the cause of your hearing impairment has been identified, you will be able to get the right treatment and support, such as a hearing aid.

## What will happen during the appointment?

**It is important that your ears are completely clear of wax for this appointment.**

**If you have any questions during the appointment, feel free to ask at any point.**

The Audiologist will have a look in your ears. You will be asked some questions about your ears and have a general discussion about how your hearing affects day-to-day activities. The Audiologist will use your answers to complete a questionnaire about specific situations in which you may or may not be having difficulties.

The first part of the hearing test will then be carried out. Headphones will be placed over your ears or a bone-conductor headband behind one ear, and you will be asked to respond by pressing a button as soon as you hear a sound. These sounds will vary in loudness and pitch. We measure the pitch of hearing in Hertz (Hz) and loudness in decibels (dB).

If appropriate, another part of the test will be performed, whereby a small rubber probe will be placed against the outside of your ear to alter the pressure within your ear canal. This is to see how well your eardrum and middle ear are functioning.

The Audiologist will then discuss the results with you and explain how they correspond to the difficulties that you may have been having.

If you are not suitable for a hearing aid, the Audiologist may discuss some listening tactics to help improve day-to-day activities.

If you would benefit from a hearing aid, the Audiologist will show you what our digital hearing aids look like and recommend either one or two hearing aids depending on your hearing loss. We use modern digital hearing aids that sit just behind the ear. There are two types of fitting with the hearing aids - an ear mould or an open fit style with a thin tube and rubber tip that sits just inside the ear. We will advise a fitting which suits the nature of your hearing loss.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures from the RNID Facts and Figures Information Sheets March 2006 – Researched by the MRC



## What are the benefits of wearing two hearing aids?

It is known that the advantages of having hearing aids in both ears are:

- Better speech discrimination, especially when there is a lot of background noise present
- Being able to hear speech in quiet environment better, as both ears are working together
- Better ability to localise sounds (tell where the sounds are coming from)
- Better overall sound quality
- A feeling of sound being balanced in both ears if you have a hearing loss in both of them

N.B. Having two hearing aids may not be suitable for everyone. The Audiologist will discuss all options with you.

## Will I receive my hearing aid on the same day?

In most cases we are able to provide a hearing aid on the same day as the test, however if you require an ear mould, an impression will be taken of your ear(s). This involves syringing some soft impression material into your ear and waiting for it to set (about three minutes). It will be removed and sent to the manufacturers to be made. We will then ask you to come back in for an appointment to have the hearing aid fitted. This is usually within four weeks.

If you are being fitted with open fit style hearing aid, we will ensure it sits comfortably in your ear. Measurements will then be taken with a computer using a small tube that sits in your ear and a speaker that will play sound at different loudness levels. The measurements taken will be used to programme the hearing aid to give you the necessary amplification, according to your hearing test results.

We will explain how to use the hearing aid and how to look after it. Batteries are provided free of charge by the NHS and available at several NHS locations across northern Devon. We will also ensure you know how to contact the Audiology service if you experience problems or your hearing aid becomes faulty.

Before you leave we will help you to put the hearing aid in your ear and make sure you can operate the hearing aid. We will give you further advice about how to get the most benefit out of your hearing aid(s).

## Do I receive any follow-up care?

One of the Audiology team will call you two months after you have had your hearing aids fitted to see how you are getting on. We will ask you a few questions to check that the hearing aids are working and ask how they have improved situations, in which you previously reported to be having difficulties.

If you are having problems, we will then arrange a follow-up appointment at a time convenient to you. This appointment will take approximately 30 minutes and you will see an audiologist or associate audiologist.

We will ask you some questions which will give us an idea of what further help you may need. We may make adjustments to the hearing aid to improve sound quality. It may be necessary to give you further instruction on how to use the hearing aid more effectively, including:

- Using the telephone
- Assistive listening devices (hearing equipment for the home)
- Improving communication tactics with other people

As part of the aftercare, unless you have further problems with the sound of the hearing aids, we only need to see you for hearing aid maintenance (approx. every six months) in one of our drop-in repair clinics (times listed below). The Audiologist will discuss this with you.

We will automatically review and re-test your hearing in five years. We will contact you nearer the time to make an appointment. If you feel that your hearing changes in the meantime, we can arrange for another hearing test sooner. You can contact us directly and do not have to go back to your GP to arrange this appointment.

## Is there anywhere locally that provides special equipment for people with hearing loss?

For specific equipment, such as amplifiers for doorbells, telephones and purchasing other listening devices including loop systems, you can contact the sight and hearing team at Living Options Northern Devon (formerly the See Hear Centre) in Barnstaple, which is a free resource for people with sight or hearing loss. It is a 'try before you buy' equipment service and the team also provide further useful information and support.

To make an appointment, contact the team on 01271 373236 or text/SMS to 07831 515809. The email address is [seeheard@livingoptions.org](mailto:seeheard@livingoptions.org)

Alternatively, Sound Base in Exeter provides a similar service.

Tel/textphone: 01392 424018

Email: [soundbase@devon.gov.uk](mailto:soundbase@devon.gov.uk)

## What will happen to my hearing test results?

A copy of your test results, as well as an accompanying letter, will always be sent to the person who referred you to the Audiology Department. This will normally be your GP. If you require an onward referral to the Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Department, which may request further tests, a letter will be sent to the ENT consultant explaining the reason for the referral and requesting an appointment with them. You will have the option of receiving a copy of these reports. A copy of the hearing test is also stored in your hospital records and on the Audiology database.

## How to contact us?

If you have any queries about your appointment or problems as a result of the test/procedure or about your hearing aid(s), then you can contact the Audiology Department on **01271 322476**, between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday. Alternatively, you can email us at [ndht.audiology@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.audiology@nhs.net).

Hearing aids can also be posted to this department for repair. To enable a quicker turnaround due to any unforeseen postal delays within the hospital, please enclose a stamped addressed envelope with adequate postage for return, along with your record book. To find out cost of postage, please go to [www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com) or contact Royal Mail by telephone on 08457 740 740 or textphone 08456 000 606.

N.B. Please note – a lost hearing aid may incur a charge.

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## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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