



HEARING LOSS (GENERAL INFORMATION)

The human ear functions as a sound amplifier. Sound is collected by the external ear and then channeled down the ear canal. Sound energy then causes the ear drum and its attached three hearing bones to vibrate. These hearing bones are called the malleus, incus and stapes. The stapes acts like a small piston and causes vibrations in the inner nerve which follows the internal ear canal to the brain. Anything that interferes with this process can cause a hearing loss. Things which prevent the hearing bones or ear drum from moving cause a conductive hearing loss. Things which interfere with the ability of the inner ear, hearing nerve, or brain to transmit these impulses cause a sensorineural hearing loss.

Causes of a conductive hearing loss include ear canal wax, ear canal infection, fluid or infection behind the ear drum, or fixation of the hearing bones. Most conductive hearing losses can be treated and even corrected. Sometimes minor surgery is required to either drain fluid from the middle ear, or reconstruct the hearing bones.

Causes of a sensorineural hearing loss include advanced age, exposure to medications, exposure to loud noises, infections of the inner ear or brain, growths of the inner ear or brain, or even something that is inherited through family members or relatives. At times it is necessary to do further testing to determine the cause of a sensorineural hearing loss. This may require tests of inner ear function, blood tests, or even an MRI scan. Sometimes a sensorineural hearing loss can be improved with medications. Sometimes a hearing aid is necessary.