

Causes of Hearing Loss

Is it my fault or not?

Parents often wonder if something they did caused their child's hearing loss. In most cases, the answer is "no."

Children may be born with a hearing loss.

Or they may get it after birth for other reasons.

You may never know for sure what caused your child's hearing loss.

Does it matter what caused it?

Knowing what caused your child's hearing loss may be helpful.

- It can sometimes tell you how to treat the hearing loss.
- It may alert you to other problems you should look for.
- It may let you know whether your child's hearing loss may change as she grows.
- It may tell you if other family members might develop hearing loss.

Here are some things that may cause hearing loss in babies and children. Click on a link to read about each one:

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[Infections during pregnancy](#)

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Ear infections

Ear infections and fluid in the ears may block sound from moving from the outer ear to the inner ear.

- Blocking the sound can cause a mild or moderate hearing loss.
- Doctors call this [conductive hearing loss](#) (con-DUC-tiv)
- Usually this kind of hearing loss goes away when the infection clears up

What you can do

- Give your child antibiotics or other medicine, if her doctor says to do so.
- Take your child back for another checkup after you finish treatment. The doctor may want to recheck your child's ears and/or her hearing.
- Talk to your doctor if your child's ear infections keep coming back. The doctor may want to place tiny tubes through your child's eardrums. The tubes let liquid drain out.

This is done through surgery. Putting tubes in cuts down on your child's risk of having future ear infections and hearing loss.

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Infections during pregnancy

Infections in a pregnant woman can cause hearing loss in her baby. They may damage the baby's inner ear.

- Doctors call this **sensorineural hearing loss (sen-sor-ee-NUR-al)**. Some people call this "nerve deafness."
- Only certain infections during pregnancy have been linked with hearing loss. Here are 4 examples:
 - [German measles \(rubella\)](#)
 - [Cytomegalovirus \(CMV\)](#)
 - [Toxoplasmosis](#)
 - [Syphilis](#)
- Usually, infections in the mother will only hurt the baby's hearing during the first 3 months of her pregnancy. That's when the baby's hearing system is growing.

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Infections in the mother at birth

Sometimes a mother can pass infections to her baby during birth. Some of these infections can cause hearing loss in the baby, like:

- [Group B streptococcus \(GBS\)](#)
- [Herpes Simplex Virus \(HSV\)](#)

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Problems during birth

There are 3 things that can happen to a baby during birth that might cause hearing loss:

- Not getting enough oxygen. This is called **oxygen deprivation**.
- Having [jaundice](#) (JON-dis). With jaundice, the baby's skin looks yellow.
- Getting hurt during birth. This is called birth trauma (TRAW-ma).

These problems can cause certain types of hearing loss.

- Jaundice and oxygen deprivation can cause sensorineural hearing loss. Again, some people call this "nerve deafness."
- Birth trauma can cause [central auditory dysfunction](#). This is a problem in the hearing pathway between the inner ear and the brain. A person with central auditory dysfunction may have trouble understanding the meaning of different sounds.

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Infections during infancy and childhood

Certain childhood illnesses may damage the inner ear and result in hearing loss.

- bacterial and viral meningitis (men-in-JY-tis)
- mumps
- chicken pox

The high fevers that children get with these infections may also cause brain damage. This can lead to other disabilities.

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Medicine

In some cases, certain medicines may damage the inner ear. They can cause hearing loss in *certain* people when they are used in *high doses*. Doctors know of at least 2 medicines that can sometimes cause this problem:

- Gentamicin. This is an [antibiotic](#). This is a drug that fights cancer.

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Noise

Noise can damage the structures of the inner ear. This can cause [sensorineural hearing loss](#) or "nerve deafness."

- Hearing **loud noises** over a period of time may cause hearing loss.
- Hearing a **sudden loud noise** can also cause hearing loss.
- Read more about [hearing loss caused by noise](#).

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Genetics

Researchers think that up to half of all childhood hearing loss may be passed down through the family.

- This may be true even when you don't know anyone else in your family who has a hearing loss.
- To find out more about this subject, go to our section on the [genetics of hearing loss](#).
- [Waardenburg Syndrome](#) may cause hearing loss. This syndrome is genetic.

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