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Fluctuating Hearing Loss

If you think your child's hearing is changing, get his hearing tested. Then get help early.

Fluctuating hearing loss can be confusing to parents. It can happen to children with normal hearing, and to children with hearing loss.

What is fluctuating hearing loss?
A **fluctuating hearing loss (FLUK-chew-ate-ing)** changes over time. It can get worse and better. It's different from progressive hearing loss, where the hearing loss gets worse suddenly, or over time.

Fluctuating hearing loss can cause conductive, sensorineural or mixed hearing loss. Sometimes fluctuating loss can become a permanent hearing loss that gets worse over time. Take your child to an audiologist and a doctor to see if you can do something about the fluctuating hearing loss.

Causes of fluctuating hearing loss
If you think your child has a fluctuating hearing loss, get him tested to find out what's causing it. If you find out the cause, you may be able to do something about it.

Middle and Outer Ear Problems

- Infections often cause fluctuating hearing loss. Your child's hearing can get worse during an infection when there's liquid in the ear. But it should get better once the ear infection clears up.
- Earwax can block your child's ear canal. This can cause a hearing loss. Earwax can be a problem for children who wear earmolds and hearing aids. When earwax blocks your child's ear canal, his hearing aid may a high-pitched noise whistling noise called feedback.

Disease

Different diseases can affect hearing in different ways:

- Meniere's Disease causes fluctuations in hearing. But this doesn't happen a lot in children.
- Autoimmune inner ear illness can make hearing worse. But with treatment it may get better.
- Meningitis can cause hearing loss in 1 out of 10 children. But sometimes the hearing loss gets better after several months.

Auditory Neuropathy

Sometimes children with auditory neuropathy have fluctuating hearing loss. Doctors think that damaged auditory nerves cause auditory neuropathy. But because we don't know exactly what causes auditory neuropathy, we don't know why it causes changes in hearing.

Enlarged Vestibular Aqueduct

A vestibular aqueduct is the channel that connects a child's inner ear to his brain. This problem means that a child's vestibular aqueduct is bigger than it should be.

If your child has this problem, he could have a progressive or fluctuating hearing loss. He should also be careful not to hit his head (this could cause more damage).

Loud Noises

Loud noises can cause a small hearing loss and ringing in the ears for several hours. Then hearing gets better. But this short-term hearing loss can get worse over many years. This doesn't happen a lot to children, but protect your child against loud noises anyway.

Signs of fluctuating hearing loss
It can be hard to tell if your child has fluctuating hearing loss. This is true especially if your child is very young, like a baby or toddler. But here are some signs of a fluctuating hearing loss:

If a child has normal hearing

As a baby, he might:

- Not show interest in music
- Not become quiet when his mother speaks

If your baby starts acting only a little bit differently, you might not notice anything.

It's easier to tell if an older child with normal hearing has a fluctuating hearing loss. He might:

- Not pay as much attention as before
- Get distracted more easily
- Not understand directions correctly

If a child has a hearing loss

If you already know that your child has a hearing loss, it may be easier to tell if he starts acting differently to sounds you know he should hear. As a baby, he might:

- Not want to wear his hearing aid
- Act like his hearing aid battery isn't working anymore

An older child can tell you when his hearing changes.

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You can find this page online at:
http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/information/hearingloss/types/fluctuating.jsp