

Managing Concerns About Hearing Loss After Cancer Treatment



UHN

Information for cancer survivors

Learn about:

- What causes hearing loss
- How chemotherapy drugs can affect your hearing
- Common signs of hearing loss
- What you can do to manage hearing loss

What causes hearing loss?

There can be many causes of hearing loss, such as:

- wax build-up in the ear
- fluid behind the eardrum
- infection
- noise
- some types of medicine
- normal aging

Normal aging is the most common cause of hearing loss.

For those over the age of 65: at least 1 out of every 4 people has some loss of hearing.

For those over the age of 75: 4 out of every 10 people have some hearing loss.

Some cancer treatments can also cause hearing problems.

These treatments include:

- radiation
- chemotherapy drugs (Cisplatin)

If you have hearing loss, it may be caused by one factor or many factors.

How can chemotherapy drugs affect my hearing?

Cisplatin is a drug used for chemotherapy. This drug can affect your hearing in different ways. You may:

- feel numb in your ears
- feel like you have “pins and needles”
- have ringing in your ears (tinnitus)
- have trouble hearing high-pitch sounds

Numbness or “pins and needles” may be a sign that cisplatin has damaged the nerves. This most often starts during chemotherapy, and goes away with time.

It can take months or even years to go away completely.

In rare cases, it can affect everyday activities, such as having trouble when you button your shirt.

Men who took cisplatin may have trouble hearing high-pitch sounds.

This side-effect is more common:

- with higher doses
- for older men
- for men who had hearing problems before taking cisplatin



Important: If you took cisplatin, speak to your oncologist or family doctor to schedule screenings at the following times:

- Right after finishing your treatment
- 6 months after finishing your treatment
- 1 year after finishing your treatment

If you notice that the ringing in your ears or loss of hearing continues, make an appointment to get a hearing test. You will need to get screened once a year.

What are common signs of hearing loss?

You may have some hearing loss if:

- your speech is muffled or unclear
- you often ask others to speak more slowly, clearly and loudly
- you need to turn up the volume of the television or radio
- it is hard for you to understand words when there is background noise, or when you are in a crowd of people

Some other signs are:

- you have ringing in your ears that does not go away
- you withdraw from conversations
- you avoid some social settings

When should I talk to my doctor?

If you have signs of hearing loss, make an appointment to get your hearing tested. Getting help can make a big difference, and improve your quality of life.

Go back to your doctor if:

- your hearing problems are making daily life difficult
- your friends and family notice that your hearing is getting worse

If you have sudden hearing loss in one or both ears, see your doctor as soon as possible.

What can I do to manage hearing loss?

Face people to hear better

- It helps to face a person when you have a conversation.

Turn off background noise

- Noise from a television or radio can make it hard to have a conversation.

Ask others to speak clearly

- Most people will be helpful if they know you are having trouble hearing them.

Choose quiet settings

- When you go to a restaurant or social event, choose a place to talk that is away from noisy areas.

Use hearing devices

- Hearing devices can help you hear the sounds you need to hear. Some examples are TV-listening systems or telephone-amplifying devices. These can help you hear better, and block out other noises around you.

How can I protect my hearing?

If you work in a noisy environment:

1. Get regular hearing tests to find any problems early on.
2. Protect your ears at work.
 - Try using special earmuffs that protect your hearing. These look like earphones. They bring most loud sounds down to a better level.
 - Earplugs can also protect your ears from noise. There are different earplugs, such as foam, pre-formed, or custom-molded earplugs. They are made of plastic or rubber.

Protect your ears even when you are having fun

- Wear hearing protectors during loud outdoor or indoor activities.
- Turn down the volume if the music is loud.
- These activities can damage your ears: listening to loud music, riding a snowmobile, or hunting. Try taking breaks during these activities.

How do I talk to my doctor about hearing loss?

Here are some tips to help you prepare for an appointment with your doctor.



Make a list of any signs or symptoms.

- Ask your loved ones to help you make the list. Friends and family may have noticed changes that are not obvious to you. These may be important for your doctor to know.
- Note how long you have had these symptoms.



Write down medical information that your doctor may need, such as:

- Any infections.
- Any injury to your ear or ear surgery you had in the past.
- Any medications, vitamins or supplements you are taking.



Make a list of all the jobs you have had.

- Include any jobs where there were high noise levels.



Take a family member or friend along.

- There might be too much information to take in at one time. A friend or family member can help you to remember what the doctor said.



Write down questions to ask your doctor.

- Having a list of questions can help you make the most of your time with your doctor.

What questions should I ask my doctor?

Ask any questions you have. Here are some questions to include:

- Why am I having these symptoms?
- Could something else be causing them, other than my cancer treatment?
- What tests do you recommend?
- Is my medicine making my symptoms worse?
- Should I see a specialist?

Where can I get more information?

See these websites for more information:

Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.com/health/hearing-loss/DS00172

British United Provident Association (BUPA)

www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/h/hearing-loss

Cancer.Net

www.cancer.net/cancer-types/testicular-cancer/after-treatment

Coping with Cancer magazine - November - December, 2008 issue

copingmag.com/cwc/index.php/article/hearing_loss

Remember:

- ✓ Get your hearing tested regularly and protect your ears
- ✓ Choose a quiet place to have a conversation
- ✓ Don't be shy to ask someone to speak louder
- ✓ Use a hearing device