



Supporting Your Infant with Hearing Impairment

What are hearing impairments?

Hearing impairments are conditions which may impact your infant's ears or hearing. Hearing impairments may cause significant hearing loss and affect speech and language development. This can impact your infant's social skills and learning. It is important to identify early signs of hearing impairment to preserve these functions.

When will hearing concerns be picked up?

Your infant will be tested for hearing impairments during several routine screening tests. A newborn hearing test can be done within the first few weeks after birth. This test is non-invasive and will not hurt your infant. The newborn hearing test may not pick up all types of hearing loss but will be able to identify any major deficits that your infant may have. There will be additional hearing tests done in childhood and adolescence. These tests can be done at any age if you have concerns about your infant's hearing. If these tests do not produce a conclusive result, your infant may be referred to a hearing specialist at an audiology clinic. It is normal to feel worried about your infant and concerned about their future. There are lots of resources to help support you and your infant, including your GP, audiology clinic and online organisations such as the National Deaf Children's Society.

What are the most common causes?

There are two main types of hearing impairments: sensori-neural and conductive hearing loss. Sensori-neural hearing loss means that there is a problem in the inner ear section of your infant's ear. This may be due to problems with the nerve or a part of the inner ear called the cochlea. Conductive hearing loss is when the sound waves are not conducted into the inner ear and are blocked before passing through the outer or middle ear. More information about the causes and types of hearing impairment can be found on the National Deaf Children's Society website.

How can I support my infant?

Infants with hearing impairments can live a normal life with the support of the people around them. The types of support needed will vary depending on the extent of your infant's hearing impairment. Medically, it is important to identify and treat any reversible causes of hearing impairment early on and attend regular check-ups at your GP or audiology clinic as recommended. This will help prevent any speech or language delay, which may cause problems with social skills in the future. The hearing specialists will be able to provide information on any assistive technology which may be useful for your infant, such as hearing aids or specialist home equipment. Your infant may use different methods of communicating depending on their hearing impairment. This may include using spoken language or the use of sign language. When you are communicating with your infant, try to maintain eye contact and use lots of expression in your face to keep their attention on you. When you want your infant to listen, try to stay away from distracting noises and move closer to your infant instead of raising your voice. When your infant starts to attend nursery and school, you can help their transition by informing the teachers and staff about your child's condition and giving them some tips on how to communicate and interact with your child appropriately. If it is necessary, your hearing specialist may refer your child to a specialist school for deaf children to ensure they get the necessary support. Finally, it is important to support your infant by looking after your mental and physical wellbeing as a parent. It can be challenging and worrying to care for an infant with a hearing impairment. Remember that there are lots of resources available to provide information on supporting your infant, as well as support groups for families who are going through similar situations. Always remember that you can reach out to your GP or health visitor for additional support if you feel that you are becoming overwhelmed or need more help.