

Why Do Fluctuations in Hearing Level Occur?

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Those of us with hearing loss have something in common: We have learned to cherish our remaining hearing. And, since we do treasure our hearing, it is normal to experience worry or anxiety if we sense that more of our hearing will be lost. It is important to remember that hearing can fluctuate, sometimes on a daily basis. Reasons for this change can range from easily explained and correctible causes to very complicated biological processes. Here are a few reasons for hearing fluctuations and some coping strategies.

Simple reasons your hearing might change from day to day:

Your hearing aid battery is near death! When I purchased a supply of generic batteries, in the hope of saving money, I found they did not last nearly as long as the "name brands". Remember to keep good quality batteries on hand and check the expiration date to make sure they are fresh.

Is Your hearing aid in place properly and is your ear mold clean? Also, ear molds need to be cleaned regularly. Sound needs a clear path to get to the eardrum, and if those tiny holes are plugged, your hearing will be diminished.

Cerumen, or good old-fashioned earwax, could be blocking your ear canal. This natural substance cleans and lubricates your ears. Everyone has it, some in greater quantity than others. Impacted earwax needs to be removed by a professional. If you poke a hole in your eardrum trying to clean it out, you will definitely notice a hearing change (along with great pain).

Is background noise interfering? Even a quiet fan or softly playing radio can compete with the voice of a person sitting in front of you. An increase in ringing in the ear (tinnitus), can be loud enough to drown out the words you are trying to hear. Your hearing has not changed, just the environment in which you are trying to hear.

Are you overly tired? Fatigue may cause a drop in your hearing because concentration isn't as keen and important cues that boost speech comprehension can be missed. It takes a great deal of concentration to hear, read lips and watch body language.

More complex reasons for hearing changes:

Is the humidity up? Is a storm on it's way? People with arthritis "feel it" in their bones. Some hard of hearing people are very sensitive to these weather changes, and feel the pressure increase in their ears accompanied by a temporary drop in hearing. When the atmospheric pressure levels off, hearing returns.

Do you have allergies or an ear infection? Swollen tissue in the sinuses, and fluid built up in the Eustachian tubes can cause temporary hearing loss. There are many medications, prescription as well as over-the-counter, that can help this situation. Pressure, drainage, fever and pain usually mean an ear infection. A visit to the doctor is in order here.

Have you recently been exposed to loud noises? A loud concert, gunshot or fireworks that were a little too loud and close by can affect hearing. At a NASCAR race, I was very startled by the jets flying overhead, breaking the sound barrier. Loud noises can damage the delicate inner ear, and cause permanent damage.

Do you have Meniere's disease? With this complex inner ear disease, hearing changes are common. Salt restriction must be followed and diuretics used to reduce fluid pressure.

Reasons to call your physician right away:

These two situations are very serious and could result in permanent hearing loss if you don't act quickly.

If you have a sudden and severe decrease in hearing, not associated with the situations listed above, this could indicate autoimmune inner ear disease or even a stroke.

If you have just started a new medication, or are taking a known ototoxic medication, and your hearing decreases, notify the physician right away.

Many causes for a decrease in hearing are preventable. Being aware of what can happen and what you are particularly sensitive to, can help relieve your anxiety and put you back on the path to a better quality of life.