

Patient information factsheet

Unilateral hearing loss

This factsheet is designed for the families of children with unilateral (one-sided) hearing loss. It aims to provide information on what can cause unilateral hearing loss, how it might affect your child and what can be done to help them. It also provides useful links which you may wish to visit for more information.

What is unilateral hearing loss and what causes it?

Unilateral hearing loss is a hearing loss in one ear. It can range from mild to profound. There are many potential causes for unilateral hearing loss. It is often present from birth but can also develop over time. Often, the cause of the unilateral hearing loss is not found.

Potential causes of unilateral hearing loss include:

- genetics
- problems during pregnancy/birth
- abnormal development of the inner ear
- infections such as meningitis/measles
- head injuries.

Your child may be referred for testing to investigate the cause of their unilateral hearing loss. This includes a series of medical tests to look for the potential cause. These tests can help find the cause of unilateral hearing loss in around 40-50% of cases.

What effect could unilateral hearing loss have on my child?

Children with a unilateral hearing loss will usually be able to follow a conversation in a quiet environment easily and most will develop normal speech and progress well at school.

For some children, their hearing loss may have an impact on their development.

The most common difficulties experienced by children with unilateral hearing loss are:

- Hearing sounds and speech coming from the affected side (for example, a child with a left-sided hearing loss may notice that they struggle to hear people who talk to them from the left hand side)
- Identifying where sounds are coming from – it is important to be aware of this as it can cause difficulties when trying to cross the road, as it makes it trickier to work out where the traffic is. It is important to teach your child to take extra care to cross the road safely.
- Understanding speech in the presence of background noise

How can I make listening and communication easier for my child?

- Reduce background noise where you can.
- Try to make sure you are on the side of your child's better hearing ear when you speak to them.
- Try to get your child's attention before you speak to them.

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Will my child's hearing get worse?

All hearing losses are different and we will want to monitor your child's hearing on a regular basis to check for any possible changes. Some hearing losses can deteriorate over time, but it often remains unchanged. If you notice any changes in your child's hearing, please let us know and we will try to arrange a review appointment.

Will hearing aids help?

Many children with unilateral hearing loss will manage without a hearing aid. However some may benefit from some additional help.

A hearing aid is used to make sounds louder for the ear which has a hearing loss. In cases of severe or profound hearing losses in one ear, a device known as a CROS (contralateral routing of signal) aid can be used. A CROS aid is designed to transfer sounds from the poorer hearing ear to the ear with normal hearing. It is made of two parts. On the poorer hearing side a unit containing a microphone is worn to pick up sound from this side. The sound is then transmitted to the second part worn on the normal hearing ear. This allows sound from all directions to be heard, but does not give information about the location of sounds.

There are other types of hearing aid which may be beneficial to some children; we will discuss these with you if we feel they may be useful for your child.

Useful links

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)

www.ndcs.org.uk

Email: helpline@ndcs.org.uk

Telephone: **0808 800 8880**

Contact us

Department of Audiology and Hearing Therapy

Level A

Royal South Hants Hospital

Brintons Terrace

Southampton

SO14 0YG

Email: rshaudiology@uhs.nhs.uk

Telephone: **023 8120 2997**

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