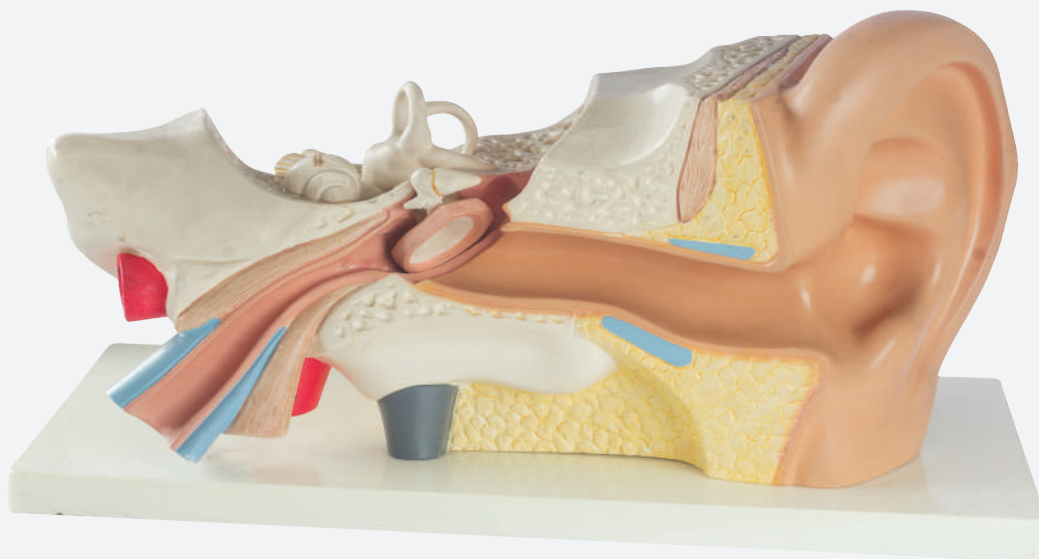


Age-related hearing loss

Also known as presbycusis, this condition — which develops as sound-perception hair cells in the inner ear and hearing nerve deteriorate or get damaged over time — creeps up so gradually that it often goes unnoticed.



Adjunct A/Prof Lynne Lim
*Ear, Nose & Throat –
Head & Neck Surgeon*

Lynne Lim Ear Nose Throat & Hearing Centre (Child & Adult)

3 Mount Elizabeth
#17-07 Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre
Singapore 228510
Tel: 6737 7787

1 Farrer Park Station Road
#15-02 Farrer Park Medical Centre
Singapore 217562
Tel: 6702 0990

www.drlynnelim.com

In a 2010 census of Singapore, about 20% of adults in their 50s and more than 50% of those over 60 have hearing loss.

Hearing loss affects many aspects of life

It reduces one's confidence and ability to learn; it adversely affects one's social and work life, ultimately reducing quality of life. Depression, dementia and memory loss are two to five times more likely in a person with hearing loss. The risk of falls and hospitalisation after just mild hearing loss is three times more than before the hearing loss.

When so much effort is spent guessing what others are saying, there is little brain space left for memory and other functions. Scans show that areas of the brain associated with sound and speech processing shrink with hearing loss — sounds of water boiling, oncoming traffic, alarms and instructions are easily missed.

Signs of hearing loss are easily missed

Does your family suspect you have hearing loss? Do you feel frustrated talking to people because you can't seem to hear them clearly? Do you have difficulty listening to the TV or radio, and in restaurants and meetings? These are common symptoms. Sounds seem to have become softer, distorted and jumbled, especially when there is background noise. As

these symptoms often creep up gradually, hearing loss is often overlooked unless formal tests are conducted in a soundproof room.

Treatment options

It is important to first exclude any treatable or dangerous hearing conditions, such as infections or nerve tumours.

In most cases, hearing aids are all that is needed. In severe deafness, cochlear implant surgery can help. For single-sided deafness, there is a bone-anchored hearing aid option. Our centre has soundproof hearing test rooms supported by in-house full-time audiologists. We also offer trials with different brands of hearing and bone-anchored aids. Tinnitus (ringing ears) and ear-related balance issues are managed together. Hearing outcomes depend on the duration of hearing loss, brain sound processing ability, type and cause of the hearing loss. Correct expectations and commitment to follow-up is needed.

Although hearing loss is irreversible, hearing function can improve with time. It is lovely to see patients' faces light up when they first hear what many others with good hearing have taken for granted, be it a hearing aid for a 90-year-old senior citizen or a surgical cochlear implant for a nine-month-old baby. 