

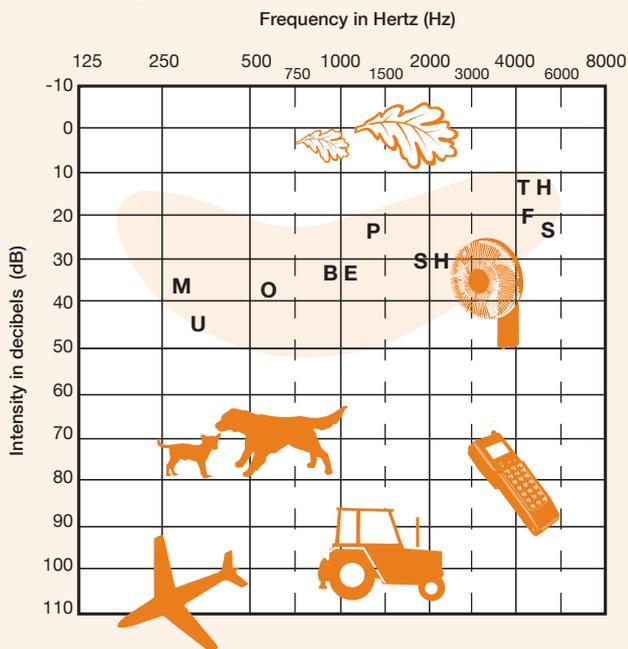
What is unilateral hearing loss?



I have been told my child has a unilateral hearing loss.

What does this mean?

A unilateral hearing loss means that your child's hearing has been found to be different in each ear. On one side, your child's hearing is at a level considered within the normal range. On the other side, your child's hearing is below the normal range. There are different levels of hearing loss. They are described as mild, moderate, severe or profound. A unilateral loss can be at any of these levels. The diagram below shows how your child hears low and high pitched sounds. A mild or greater unilateral hearing loss can make it hard to hear speech sounds when people talk on the side where there is a hearing loss.



Why does my child have a hearing loss?

It is not always possible to determine the cause of a hearing loss. Your audiologist will be able to refer you to an otolaryngologist ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist or paediatrician who will help you to explore the possible reasons for your child's hearing loss. Often it is hard to find the cause of hearing loss. In 50 to 60 percent of cases of permanent hearing loss in New Zealand no known cause is found.

How will having a unilateral hearing loss affect my child?

In young children, it can be difficult to tell that they have a hearing loss in one ear. While your child is likely to hear well in most environments, there may be a few situations in which your child may have more difficulty.

Children with a hearing loss in one ear may have difficulty:

- locating the direction a sound is coming from
- understanding speech in a noisy environment
- hearing speech or sounds which are directed towards the ear with the hearing loss.

How can I help my child to hear?

A child with a unilateral hearing loss may have difficulty hearing when they are listening in a noisy environment. There are lots of ways you can help your child, for example:

- reduce background noise when possible – at home you can turn off TVs and radios when they are not in use, and close doors
- move away from noises when you want your child to hear you
- get your child's attention before you start talking
- make eye contact with your child when you are communicating – this will help hold your child's attention
- move closer to your child when talking so that your voice reaches your child's ears as clearly and loudly as possible. Within one metre is often thought of as a good distance.

Ear infections can cause a temporary reduction in hearing, which may especially affect a child with unilateral hearing loss who is relying on their 'good ear'. Prompt attention from your family doctor when you suspect your child has an ear infection is recommended.

How can I talk to my child so that my words sound clearer?

The most important thing you can do is to continue to talk naturally to your child. The following visual strategies may also be helpful.

- Use facial expressions and natural gestures as they provide additional 'clues' to aid your child's understanding. You may want to use some New Zealand Sign language to support your child's understanding.
- Keep still when talking. This will help your child to see your lip patterns, facial expressions and gestures.
- Try to position yourself to your child's better ear.

Will a hearing aid be helpful for my child?

Some children can benefit from wearing hearing aids and some may not. The decision about using a hearing aid or other technology can be reviewed as your child develops. The child's changing needs and typical listening environments are also important factors in the decision you make. The audiologist will be able to advise whether or not a hearing aid is likely to be beneficial.

What will happen as my child grows up?

It is important that your child's hearing loss is recognised and supported. You can help important people learn how best to communicate with your child by advising them of strategies that improve hearing and understanding.

The audiologist should assess your child's hearing regularly in order to help build up a full description of the quietest sounds your child can hear at different pitches in each ear. In this way, any changes in your child's hearing will be picked up quickly. If you suspect your child's hearing has changed, contact your local audiology clinic.

If you have any concerns about your child's language, communication and learning development please contact your audiologist, who may refer you to the Ministry of Education.

More information

The New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children (NZFDC) is an organisation which offers parent-to-parent support and advice to families and whānau of children with hearing loss.

Your child's audiologist can refer you or you can contact them directly by:

Freephone: 0800 DEAFCHILD (0800 332 324)

Text: 027 214 6901

Email: deafchildren@xtra.co.nz

Website: www.deafchildren.org.nz

For more information about children's hearing loss, and support available go to the:

- Ministry of Health website www.health.govt.nz
- Ministry of Education website www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation/ServicesAndSupport/DeafAndHearingImpaired.aspx
- Ministry of Education resource *Getting Started* – available from www.minedu.govt.nz