

Hearing Problems

Although not a common symptom, hearing problems can sometimes be caused by multiple sclerosis (MS). But there are also other possible causes which are more common. If you develop hearing problems, you should contact your GP so that you can have the problem properly investigated.

MS-related hearing problems are usually a short-term symptom. For example, they might come on during a relapse, and they usually improve once the relapse is over. But some people do experience longer lasting changes to their hearing.

The kind of hearing problems that might be caused by MS include:

- difficulty in hearing speech against a noisy background
- distorted sound
- increased sensitivity to noise
- tinnitus - the perception of noise in the ear or head. It can be a range of sounds but is usually a ringing or whistling noise

Hearing problems might mean that you find it difficult to follow conversations or hear the television or radio, particularly in a crowded environment.

Very occasionally, people develop sudden hearing loss in one or both ears because of an MS relapse. If this happens, hearing will usually improve once the relapse is over, although some problems may remain.

What is happening in the brain?

Receptive aphasia

A small number of people with MS have difficulties understanding spoken language. This is known as 'receptive aphasia', and it is a problem with language processing rather than hearing. The charity Speakability has more information and support for people affected by aphasia (see **Useful organisations** on page 3).

MS-related hearing problems are usually caused by nerve damage in the 'brainstem', or other areas of your brain that are involved in processing information from the ear. The brainstem is the part of your brain that joins to the spinal cord, at the back of your head.

Vertigo

The brainstem is also involved in balancing the body. So if you have MS-related hearing

problems you might also have problems with vertigo (a spinning sensation) and balance (a rocking ship sensation).

Diagnosis

If you have hearing problems, you should get your symptoms investigated. There are lots of tests to find the cause of hearing problems and the best ways to manage them.

These tests are usually carried out by an audiologist at the local hospital or health centre – ask your GP for a referral. **Action on Hearing Loss** has more information about hearing tests (See **Useful Organisations** on page 3 for more information).

Managing MS-related hearing problems

If your hearing problems are due to an MS relapse, you might be prescribed steroids. This might help to clear up symptoms more quickly. Your hearing could also improve or return to normal on its own after a relapse.

If your hearing difficulties are longer lasting, you might find a hearing aid for one or both ears helpful. Many different types of hearing aid are available, and an audiologist can advise you on which would be most suitable.

Other devices that can help with hearing difficulties include ‘induction loops’. These are designed to work with a hearing aid. They make the sound you hear clearer and reduce background sounds and echoes.

Induction loops are usually fitted in public places such as offices or cinemas, although you can also install one in your own home. For more

information on these and other devices, contact **Action on Hearing Loss** (See **Useful Organisations** on page 3 for more information).

More common causes of hearing problems

MS can cause hearing problems, but there are other possible causes which are more common.

Causes which might affect both ears include ageing and regular exposure to high levels of noise or music for long periods of time.

There are also common conditions that usually just affect one ear, and stop sound from getting through properly to the inner ear. These include a build-up of wax, damage to the eardrum (from poking something in your ear, for example) or inflammation or infection in the middle ear (just behind your eardrum). These conditions can usually be treated.

The charity Action on Hearing Loss has more information about possible causes of hearing loss. (See **Useful Organisations** on page 3 for more information).

Useful organisations

Action on Hearing Loss

Action on Hearing Loss is the new name for the RNID. They have information about hearing loss, and provide support for people affected by hearing loss.

 **0808 808 6666** (freephone)

Textphone **0808 808 9000** (freephone)

SMS **07800 000 360**

 informationline@hearingloss.org.uk

 actiononhearingloss.org.uk

British Tinnitus Association

Provides information and support for people with tinnitus, as well as raising awareness of the condition and how to prevent it.

 **0800 018 0527** (freephone)

 info@tinnitus.org.uk

 tinnitus.org.uk

Hearing Link

Helping deaf and hard of hearing people to combat the isolation of hearing loss, through support, advice and information.

England

 /textphone **0300 111 1113**

SMS **07526 123 255**

 enquiries@hearinglink.org

 hearinglink.org

Northern Ireland

 /SMS **07534.563.451**

 northernireland@hearinglink.org

Scotland

 /textphone **0131 447 9420**

SMS **07564 916 798**

 scotland@hearinglink.org

Wales

 /textphone/SMS **07753 220075**

 wales@hearinglink.org

Scottish Council on Deafness

The lead organisation for deaf issues in Scotland.

 **0141 248 2474 & 1854**

Textphone **0141 248 2477**

SMS **07925 417 338**

 admin@scod.org.uk

 scod.org.uk

Speakability (Part of the Stroke Association)

Speakability is the national charity dedicated to supporting and empowering people with aphasia and their carers. In April 2015, Speakability (Action for Dysphasic Adults) became part of the Stroke Association.

Information and helpline **0303 303 3100**

 **020 7566 0300**

Textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

 info@stroke.org.uk

 speakability.org.uk

We're the MS Society. Our community is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between. We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

The MS Society provides this information free of charge but if you would like to help cover the cost, which will help towards our essential work, please call **0800 100 133** or visit the fundraising section of our website to make a donation. Anything you can give will be greatly appreciated.

Contact us

MS National Centre

020 8438 0700

info@mssociety.org.uk

MS Helpline

Freephone 0808 800 8000

helpline@mssociety.org.uk

Online

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MS Society Scotland

0131 335 4050

msscotland@mssociety.org.uk

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This factsheet will be reviewed within three years of publication.

Multiple Sclerosis Society

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