

Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss (SSNHL)

You have come with what is known as a Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss (nerve deafness) in the ear. This condition occurs in 5 to 20 people per 100,000 of the population.

Causes:

It is now thought that the majority of cases are caused by a viral infection of the hearing nerve itself. In a limited number of cases, it can be caused by lack of blood supply to the hearing nerve or can be due to your own immune system attacking the hearing nerve.

Rarely, sudden hearing loss can be caused by a benign, non-cancer growth on the hearing nerve, known as an acoustic neuroma. For this reason all patients with SSNHL are advised to have an MRI scan. If such a growth is discovered, you will be referred to an ENT surgeon to discuss your treatment options.

Treatment:

Hearing improves by itself (without any treatment) in up to half of people with SSNHL, although this recovery may not be complete. Usually this recovery is very soon after your hearing loss. Research suggests that there will be no further improvement in your hearing after three months have passed.

Medication:

Steroid (prednisolone) tablets have been shown to increase the number of people who recover their hearing compared to 'Nature', or observation, alone, but only if started in the first few days after you lose your hearing. **Please let your doctor know if you have diabetes, severe osteoporosis, bleeding stomach ulcers or a history of severe psychiatric disease needing hospitalization, as these may mean that steroids are unsafe for you.** Short-term side effects of prednisolone can include heartburn/indigestion, raising your blood pressure or blood sugar levels, and mood changes. These will all usually resolve when you stop using the medication. In a very small number of people, use of prednisolone has caused a condition affecting the bone of the hip joint resulting in the death of the bone of the joint.

There is ongoing debate about whether antiviral drugs help improve recovery, and in most cases they have not been shown to help more than steroids alone.

Follow up:

You will have a hearing test again in a week or so to check your progress. Notification of your appointment for an MRI will come in the mail in the next month, and you should call the X-Ray Department of this hospital if you have not heard about your appointment by this time. There is no risk to your health if the MRI is not done within the next few months.

After you know when your MRI is going to be done, **please call the Outpatient Department** of this hospital to make an appointment to discuss the results.

If the MRI scan is clear there should be no further need for outpatient appointments.

If the hearing loss doesn't improve completely you may wish to consider a trial of hearing aids to assist you with your daily communication. Any of the numerous audiology providers in the area can assist you with this if you choose, and your family doctor may be able to recommend a specific service to you.

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