

Hearing Loss Concerns During Cancer Treatment

Cancer itself rarely causes hearing loss, but some forms of cancer treatment can affect your hearing. Acting early can help if your hearing changes. This fact sheet will cover:

- **What causes cancer-related hearing loss**
- **Symptoms of possible hearing loss**
- **How to manage hearing loss**
- **Particularly vulnerable populations**



Causes of Hearing Loss During Treatment

Certain kinds of cancer treatment can impact your hearing. Your health care team may refer to this side effect of some treatments as 'ototoxicity,' or damaging to the parts of the inner ear responsible for hearing and balance. The following can cause hearing loss:

- **Cancer** – Some forms of cancer can affect hearing, particularly brain tumors and cancer that travels to the brain, as well as melanoma forming close to the ear.
- **Surgery** – Procedures that treat tumors near the ear can impact its inner structures, nerve endings and processes of hearing.
- **Chemotherapy** - Platinum-based chemotherapy can damage nerves in the ear. This is used to treat many forms of cancer, including head and neck cancer, lung cancer and ovarian cancer.
- **Radiation therapy** – Radiation directed to areas of the head, neck or brain can damage the cochlea, which is part of the inner ear.



Symptoms of Hearing Loss

Symptoms that you may be experiencing some hearing loss include the following:

- No longer hearing high pitched sounds
- Having trouble hearing someone on the phone
- Needing to turn up the volume on the television or other devices
- Some things sounding different than normal
- A ringing in your ears, also called tinnitus
- Feeling off-balance or dizzy

If you experience any of these symptoms, let your health care team know right away. If managed quickly, you may avoid permanent hearing loss.



Management and Prevention

Hearing loss from platinum-based chemotherapy and other treatments is not rare. Often, it is not enough to disrupt everyday activities and does not last. However, the damage can sometimes become permanent.

- Visit an ear, nose and throat specialist before treatment starts in order to get a baseline of your hearing ability
- Schedule hearing tests throughout treatment to track any changes

Side effects can be helped through specific remedies. For example, tinnitus, or a ringing or hissing in the ears, can be soothed with gentle white noise while sleeping. Talk to your health care team and a hearing specialist for more ideas.



Understanding Screening Guidelines

Two populations of patients are particularly vulnerable to hearing damage and loss. These are:

Children, especially those under four years of age, who are still developing their senses of hearing, which affects mental development

Older adults who are already experiencing hearing loss due to aging

When hearing loss is identified, doctors can help manage the issues that come up due to a decline in hearing ability. Improvements in cochlear implants and hearing aids provide technological support. Other ways of managing things can help, such as providing a child with proper accommodations, like moving them closer to the teacher in class, to assist with these difficulties.

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