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Types of Hearing Loss by [Bert Brown](#)

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Hearing healthcare providers may categorize your hearing impairment by its "hearing loss type" based on the location of the impairment. There are three main types of loss: conductive, sensorineural, and mixed.

Conductive hearing loss is characterized by damage, defect, or dysfunction of the outer ear, middle ear, or combination of the two. This includes the outer visible portions of the ear, the external ear canal, the ear drum, and the middle ear space located behind the ear drum where the small vibratory bones are located. Due to their shape, these bones are commonly called the hammer, anvil, and stirrup.

For people with this category of hearing loss, the volume of sound will be a primary issue. Incoming sound may seem to be dampened, muffled, or softer than normal. Common complaints include the feeling of having plugged, stopped up, or full ears.

Sensorineural hearing loss is characterized by damage, defect, or dysfunction of the inner ear (cochlea), hearing nerve, or a combination of the two. Variations of the hearing impairment may be called: sensory hearing loss, cochlear hearing loss, inner ear loss, nerve loss, or nerve deafness.

This category of loss is common in the aging population and persons at risk for heavy noise exposure. Comprehension tends to be the primary issue for this hearing impairment. Common complaints include believing that others are mumbling, not speaking clearly, or talking too quickly. Most will note that they can 'hear', but that they do not understand all that is said.

Mixed hearing loss is characterized by damage, defect, or dysfunction in a combination of the areas where conductive and sensorineural hearing loss occurs. The root of the hearing impairment occurs in both the outer/middle ear and the inner ear/hearing nerve. Both loudness and comprehension will be more difficult for this type of loss. A combination of symptoms of conductive and sensorineural hearing impairment may be experienced.

Less common categories of loss include functional and central hearing impairment. Functional hearing loss is not a typical hearing impairment. With functional loss, hearing sensitivity is functioning normally, but a loss appears to be present. The apparent hearing loss is not due to a physical defect, but rather to a psychological, psychosocial, or emotional disorder or issue. Special testing must be completed to determine if this is definitely the case. Central hearing loss is also not a standard hearing impairment, but is due to dysfunction. The peripheral hearing system is functioning normally, but the processing of sound is defective. Symptoms may mimic sensorineural hearing loss.

Ask your hearing healthcare provider to fully describe your hearing loss type, so that you can understand your symptoms better.

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