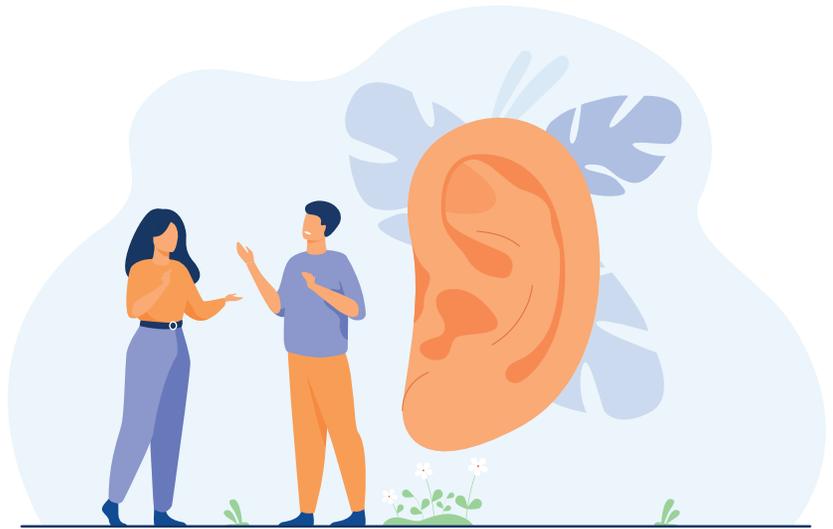


SINGLE-SIDED DEAFNESS (SSD)

Hearing in Only One Ear?



Loss of hearing in only one ear is known as single-sided deafness (SSD). Unilateral hearing loss is generally when an individual has a mild, modest, or severe hearing loss in one ear, but they have normal hearing in the other. Single-sided deafness is when the degree of hearing loss is profound. When hearing loss in only one ear comes on very suddenly, you should go to see an audiologist promptly.

As a general rule of thumb, hearing ability in the two ears should be near equal to each other. After all, your ears are the same age! If you have a history of noise exposure, it was likely the same in both ears, and if you were prescribed a medicine with a side effect that could impact hearing, it will impact both ears similarly.

We were intended to have 2 ears for a reason. Your brain uses both ears to identify the location of a sound, known as binaural hearing.

If you are feeling the effects of SSD, you know that it presents some unique challenges. Here are some you may be noticing:

- **You feel like you are not always able to identify where certain sounds are coming from.** Directional hearing or sound localization is when you hear a sound and your brain deciphers where the sound is coming from via

which ear obtains the sound first. When you cannot hear well in one ear, you will have difficulty deciding where that sound came from.

- **You have a hard time hearing in a noisy environment.** Your brain has a lot to do with your hearing. It is in charge of selective listening. This means that the brain will filter out noises that it deems to be not useful. Without good hearing in that other ear, this becomes harder for the brain to deal with. When in noisy environments, someone with SSD will struggle to focus.
- **You have a difficult time deciphering how loud a sound is.** When your brain hears a sound through both ears, it will obviously be louder. If it can only hear that sound through one ear, however, it receives signals from the nerves in that one ear and can only use that information to process the sound.
- **You have a difficult time multitasking.** In all of the above examples, the brain and the ears are always working together. SSD intensifies the cognitive load on your brain. Therefore, your brain takes longer to focus on the tasks you are trying to perform. While performing these tasks, if you are trying to listen to a person speak at the same time,

you are more than likely going to miss a good amount of what is being said.

In some patients, hearing in one ear will diverge from the other. This can result from a host of otologic issues, including viral infection of the ear, physical trauma to the ear, and of unknown origin (medically diagnosed as “idiopathic hearing loss”).

The separation of hearing levels between the two ears can sometimes be dramatic or even complete. Unfortunately, some patients have a “dead ear” (medically defined as anacusis) with normal hearing in the other ear. In other patients, there is an “asymmetric hearing loss” which implies hearing loss in one ear and even worse hearing in the other ear.

The brain was designed to hear with two ears, and it will function best with equal hearing in both ears. Binaural (two-ear) hearing has significant benefits that include increased sound localization ability (e.g. figuring out where sound is coming from in the room) and enhances perception of speech in noisy situations. These characteristics of binaural hearing are often referred to as the “Binaural Advantage”. If you know somebody with “lopsided” hearing loss, you will notice that they always strategize to improve the listening environment by having the speaker(s) on their better hearing side.

According to Hearing International:

*“While there are no exact **statistics** on the number of individuals worldwide with SSD, there are about 60,000 people in the U.S. who acquire **single-sided deafness (SSD)** every year and many of these individuals attempt to manage their hearing deficit without the benefit of a number of beneficial and readily available devices.”*

Causes of Single-Side Deafness

While there a number of reasons that you can suffer from SSD, here are some potential causes:

- Genetic or Inherited Disorders
- Viral or Bacterial Infections
- Physical Damage to the Ear
- Meniere’s Disease
- Circulatory System Disorders
- Acoustic Neuroma
- Head Trauma

However, sometimes the cause just simply cannot be identified, or the cause could be the result of a combination of factors.

Sudden Hearing Loss in One Ear

If you experience sudden hearing loss in one ear, you should always seek care from a qualified professional immediately. The faster you get treatment, the better your chances for a full recovery.

There is a huge need to expand awareness and educate on the impact of those who suffer with

SSD. With better awareness and education comes better understanding and the motivation to be more proactive about managing it and reducing any anxiety associated with it.

According to the Hearing Review:

“A total of 29 themes/situations were identified in which participants experienced difficulty because of their hearing loss. The themes are further divided into three categories: 1) Functional Impacts, 2) Psychological Impacts, and 3) Social/Behavioral Impacts.”

- 1. Functional Impacts – Listening in Noise and Localization.** This is one of the most common impacts, having a difficult time in a loud environment and in environments with loud sounds. **Fatigue** – Fatigue is another functional impact due to increased cognitive load. Your brain actually becomes exhausted from overload.
- 2. Psychological Impacts** – Fear and Anxiety. Your mental health is definitely affected by hearing loss. Fear and anxiety are most common. Fear of what is happening, and fear of a loved one being in danger and your directional hearing affecting whether you can help. Anxiety comes into play when you start worrying about how others are judging you or even dropping out of your life due to them thinking

you are ignoring them or even having to repeat themselves so often. It can be awkward and uncomfortable. **Self-Esteem and Struggle in Social Situations.** When faced with hearing loss, some people tend to feel like they are a burden to others, thus resulting in a poor perception of themselves because of difficulty in communicating.

- 3. Social/Behavioral Impacts – Reduced Social Engagement.** Communication problems in public situations can leave you with feelings of being disconnected from what is going on around you. This causes most to detach themselves and avoid social situations altogether. **Missing Out on Important Information.** When you cannot hear properly, it is easy to miss out on important information when communicating. This will leave a person feeling frustrated, discouraged, and unable to relate to others. **Stigma in the Workplace.** People sometimes feel like there is the perception of stigma or shame in the workplace when they either are not able to hear well or are wearing a hearing device. **Coping Mechanisms** – Lip reading, sign language and favoring the good ear are some coping mechanisms used when hearing is uneven.



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Schedule a Treatment Consultation at www.profhearingcare.com