

What is Hearing Loss?

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A hearing loss is when an individual loses the ability to pick up sounds at a distance. For example, instead of previously hearing a songbird 40 yards away in a tree, they now hear the bird 35 yards away. Eventually, the hearing loss may become so great that the bird needs to be within 6 inches in-order to hear it. Think of it as a gradual erosion of sounds at distances. Where once you could hear a sound far away, now it needs to be very close in-order to actually identify it.

Another way to consider it is this. Most people lose their ability to hear very soft sounds first. You can think of this as sounds farthest from where you are standing. Therefore, you lose the ability to hear a sound farthest away from you first. As it progresses, then sounds that are not that far away also begin to fade. The last sounds to go are the loudest sounds, which often are ones that are very close to you.

This is sometimes confusing, because not all sounds are equal. Every sound you hear has a different set of tones. People generally can detect a "low pitch" tone farther away than "high pitch" tone. Consider, a train can be heard much farther away in the distance than a songbird, even when we have normal hearing. Therefore, even with a hearing loss, in most cases, lower pitch tones will be heard much farther away than higher pitch tones. On top of this, most individuals with a hearing loss lose their ability to hear high pitch sounds much sooner and faster than they lose low pitch sounds. This is why many hearing impaired people can not hear the phone ring at ten feet but they can hear traffic outside their house at fifty yards distance.

Now this is the amazing thing about having a hearing loss. Generally speaking, it has very little impact on whether you can understand a conversation, at least, until it is quite far advanced. How is this possible? Please see the article on coping mechanisms.