

Infant Hearing Loss

If your newborn child:

- does not startle, move, cry or react in any way to unexpected loud noises,
- does not awaken to loud noises,
- does not turn his/her head in the direction of your voice, or
- does not freely imitate sound,
- he or she may have some degree of hearing loss.

More than three million American children have a hearing loss. An estimated 1.3 million of these children are under three years of age. Parents and grandparents are usually the first to discover hearing loss in a baby, because they spend the most time with them. If at any time you suspect your baby has a hearing loss, discuss it with your doctor. He or she may recommend evaluation by an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon (ear, nose and throat specialist).

Hearing loss can be temporary, caused by ear wax or middle ear infections. Many children with temporary hearing loss can have their hearing restored through medical treatment or minor surgery.

However, some children have sensorineural hearing loss (sometimes called nerve deafness), which is permanent. Most of these children have some usable hearing, and children as young as three months of age can be fitted with hearing aids. Early diagnosis, early fitting of hearing or other prosthetic aids, and an early start on special education programs can help maximize a child's existing hearing. This means your child will get a head start on speech and language development.