

# Hearing Problems

**A**lthough not a common symptom, hearing problems can sometimes be caused by multiple sclerosis (MS). But there are also other possible causes which are more common. If you develop hearing problems, you should contact your GP so that you can have the problem properly investigated.

MS-related hearing problems are usually a short-term symptom. For example, they might come on during a relapse, and they usually improve once the relapse is over. But some people do experience longer lasting changes to their hearing.

The kind of hearing problems that might be caused by MS include:

- difficulty in hearing speech against a noisy background
- distorted sound
- increased sensitivity to noise
- tinnitus - the perception of noise in the ear or head. It can be a range of sounds but is usually a ringing or whistling noise

Hearing problems might mean that you find it difficult to follow conversations or hear the television or radio, particularly in a crowded environment.

Very occasionally, people develop sudden hearing loss in one or both ears because of an MS relapse. If this happens, hearing will usually improve once the relapse is over, although some problems may remain.

## What is happening in the brain?

### Receptive aphasia

A small number of people with MS have difficulties understanding spoken language. This is known as 'receptive aphasia', and it is a problem with language processing rather than hearing. The charity Speakability has more information and support for people affected by aphasia (see page 4).

MS-related hearing problems are usually caused by nerve damage in the 'brainstem', or other areas of your brain that are involved in processing information from the ear. The brainstem is the part of your brain that joins to the spinal cord, at the back of your head.

### Vertigo

The brainstem is also involved in balancing the body. So if you have MS-related hearing problems you might also have problems with vertigo (a spinning sensation) and balance (a rocking ship sensation).

### Diagnosis

If you have hearing problems, you should get your symptoms investigated. There are lots of tests to find the cause of hearing problems and the best ways to manage them.

These tests are usually carried out by an audiologist at the local hospital or health centre - ask your GP for a referral. Action on Hearing Loss has more information about hearing tests (see page 2).

## Managing MS-related hearing problems

If your hearing problems are due to an MS relapse, you might be prescribed steroids. This might help to clear up symptoms more quickly. Your hearing could also improve or return to normal on its own after a relapse.

If your hearing difficulties are longer lasting, you might find a hearing aid for one or both ears helpful. Many different types of hearing aid are available, and an audiologist can advise you on which would be most suitable.

Other devices that can help with hearing difficulties include 'induction loops'. These are designed to work with a hearing aid. They make the sound you hear clearer and reduce background sounds and echoes.

Induction loops are usually fitted in public places such as offices or cinemas, although you can also install one in your own home. For more information on these and other devices, contact Action on Hearing Loss (see below).

## More common causes of hearing problems

MS can cause hearing problems, but there are other possible causes which are more common.

Causes which might affect both ears include ageing and regular exposure to high levels of noise or music for long periods of time.

There are also common conditions that usually just affect one ear, and stop sound from getting through properly to the inner ear. These include a build-up of wax, damage to the eardrum (from poking something in your ear, for example) or inflammation or infection in the middle ear (just behind your eardrum). These conditions can usually be treated.

The charity Action on Hearing Loss has more information about possible causes of hearing loss (see below).

## Useful organisations

### Action on Hearing Loss

Action on Hearing Loss is the new name for the RNID. They have information about hearing loss, and provide support for people affected by hearing loss.

 0808 808 0123 (freephone)  
Textphone 0808 808 9000 (freephone)  
SMS 07800 000 360  
 [informationline@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:informationline@hearingloss.org.uk)  
 [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

### British Tinnitus Association

Provides information and support for people with tinnitus, as well as raising awareness of the condition and how to prevent it.

 0800 018 0527 (freephone)  
 [info@tinnitus.org.uk](mailto:info@tinnitus.org.uk)  
 [www.tinnitus.org.uk](http://www.tinnitus.org.uk)

### Hearing Link

Helping deaf and hard of hearing people to combat the isolation of hearing loss, through support, advice and information.

#### England

 /textphone 0300 111 1113  
SMS 07526 123 255  
 [enquiries@hearinglink.org](mailto:enquiries@hearinglink.org)  
 [www.hearinglink.org](http://www.hearinglink.org)

#### Northern Ireland

 /SMS 07534.563.451  
 [northernireland@hearinglink.org](mailto:northernireland@hearinglink.org)

#### Scotland

 /textphone 0131 447 9420  
SMS 07564 916 798  
 [scotland@hearinglink.org](mailto:scotland@hearinglink.org)

#### Wales

 /textphone/SMS 07753 220075  
 [wales@hearinglink.org](mailto:wales@hearinglink.org)

### **Scottish Council on Deafness**

The lead organisation for deaf issues in Scotland.

 0141 248 2474 & 1854

Textphone 0141 248 2477

SMS 07925 417 338

 admin@scod.org.uk

 **www.scod.org.uk**

### **Speakability (Part of the Stroke Association)**

Speakability is the national charity dedicated to supporting and empowering people with aphasia and their carers. In April 2015, Speakability (Action for Dysphasic Adults) became part of the Stroke Association.

Information and helpline 0808 808 9572

 020 7566 1516

 melanie.derbyshire@stroke.org.uk

 **www.speakability.org.uk**

# About this resource

## Thanks

With thanks to Mary Shanks and all the people affected by MS who contributed to this resource.

Disclaimer: We have made every effort to ensure that the information in this publication is correct. We do not accept liability for any errors or omissions. The law and government regulations may change. Be sure to seek local advice from the sources listed.

## Let us know what you think

If you have any comments on this information or on the work of the MS Society, please send them to [resources@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:resources@mssociety.org.uk), or you can complete our short online survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/MSresources](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MSresources)

## References

A list of references is available on request, and all cited articles are available to borrow from the MS Society library (there may be a small charge). Contact the librarian on 020 8438 0900, or visit [www.mssociety.org.uk/library](http://www.mssociety.org.uk/library)

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## Further information from the MS Society

### Library

For more information, research articles and DVDs about MS, contact our librarian.

020 8438 0900

[librarian@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:librarian@mssociety.org.uk)

[www.mssociety.org.uk/library](http://www.mssociety.org.uk/library)

### Resources

Our award winning information resources cover every aspect of living with MS.

020 8438 0999

[shop@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:shop@mssociety.org.uk)

[www.mssociety.org.uk/publications](http://www.mssociety.org.uk/publications)

### Helpline

The Freephone MS Helpline offers confidential emotional support and information for anyone affected by MS, including family, friends and carers.

Information is available in over 150 languages through an interpreter service.

0808 800 8000 (weekdays 9am–9pm)

[helpline@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mssociety.org.uk)

# The Multiple Sclerosis Society

More than 100,000 people live with multiple sclerosis in the UK. Every one of them shares the uncertainty of life with MS. We're funding research and fighting for better treatment and care to help people with MS take control of their lives.

With your support, we will beat MS.

## Contact us

### MS National Centre

 020 8438 0700

 [info@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:info@mssociety.org.uk)

### MS Helpline

 Freephone 0808 800 8000  
(weekdays 9am-9pm)

 [helpline@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mssociety.org.uk)

### Online

 [www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)

 [www.facebook.com/mssociety](https://www.facebook.com/mssociety)

 [www.twitter.com/mssocietyuk](https://www.twitter.com/mssocietyuk)

### MS Society Scotland

 0131 335 4050

 [msscotland@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:msscotland@mssociety.org.uk)

### MS Society Northern Ireland

 028 9080 2802

 [nireception@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:nireception@mssociety.org.uk)

### MS Society Cymru

 020 8438 0700

 [mscymru@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:mscymru@mssociety.org.uk)

The MS Society provides this information free of charge but if you would like to help cover the cost, which will help towards our essential work, please call 0800 100 133 or visit the fundraising section of our website to make a donation [Donate Now]. Anything you can give will be greatly appreciated.

### Multiple Sclerosis Society

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