



## SUDDEN SENSORINEURAL HEARING LOSS

### WHAT IS IT?

Sudden sensorineural hearing loss is a rapid unexplained hearing loss, which in most cases, is idiopathic (meaning the cause is not apparent). In almost all instances, only one ear is affected. Possible associated symptoms include **ringing (tinnitus), dizziness (vertigo) and fullness in the ear**. This type of hearing loss affects the nerves of the inner ear and is different than a middle ear infection (accumulation of fluid behind the eardrum) which may develop after a cold or sinus infection.

### HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

The hearing loss is typically easily noticed by affected patients. Often, it will be immediately recognized upon awakening. Sudden sensorineural loss may follow a viral illness, but often happens sporadically. A hearing test (audiogram) should be done as soon as possible to confirm the diagnosis.

### WILL MY HEARING COME BACK?

Approximately one-third to two-thirds of patients with sudden sensorineural hearing loss may spontaneously recover some to all their hearing. Those patients with more severe hearing loss, vertigo, or age >65 tend to have a poorer prognosis. More aggressive treatment may be indicated in such cases.

### ARE THERE ADDITIONAL TESTS REQUIRED?

Rarely, sudden sensorineural hearing loss is caused by a benign tumor of the hearing and balance nerve. These tumors are called vestibular schwannomas and are diagnosed with a contrast brain MRI. Your provider may order one to screen for these tumors. While MRI's are the most sensitive test, some patients opt for ABR (auditory brainstem response) testing. This is a less sensitive, less expensive screening tool performed by an audiologist. If the ABR is abnormal then your provider will need to order an MRI.

### HOW IS IT TREATED?

Though some patients improve spontaneously, it is impossible to predict who may or may not. Thus, treatment is generally recommended. Studies indicate steroid therapy improves the likelihood of hearing recovery, and is most effective if started early, ideally within two weeks of onset. However, even if patients are initially seen beyond the first two weeks, it is still recommended to proceed with treatment. Steroids can be given in a pill form and/or as an injection through the eardrum. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is an additional potential treatment for sudden sensorineural hearing loss.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects can vary pending each treatment modality, but the most common side effects of oral steroids include increased anxiety, dizziness, elevated blood sugar or blood pressure, depression, or insomnia. Injection of steroid into the ear can avoid some of these potential systemic side effects, although causes some discomfort and a very small risk of a non-healing perforation of the eardrum.

### WHAT ELSE CAN I EXPECT?

Hearing loss has a major impact on your overall health as it can affect your mood, cognition, and your social interactions. Some will experience ringing in the ears (tinnitus) or dizziness. Counseling and discussion of your hearing restoration options should be discussed with your audiologist. A follow up audiologic evaluation should be completed within 6 months of your initial diagnosis.