

ICOPE

INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Hearing

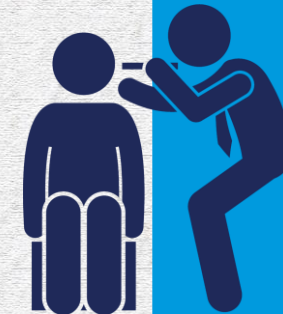


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Learning objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Explain the care pathway for managing hearing loss in older people
- List various tests for hearing assessment
- Explain how to manage conditions associated with hearing loss and provide a supporting environment
- Outline effective communication strategies for family members and carers when interacting with a person who has hearing loss



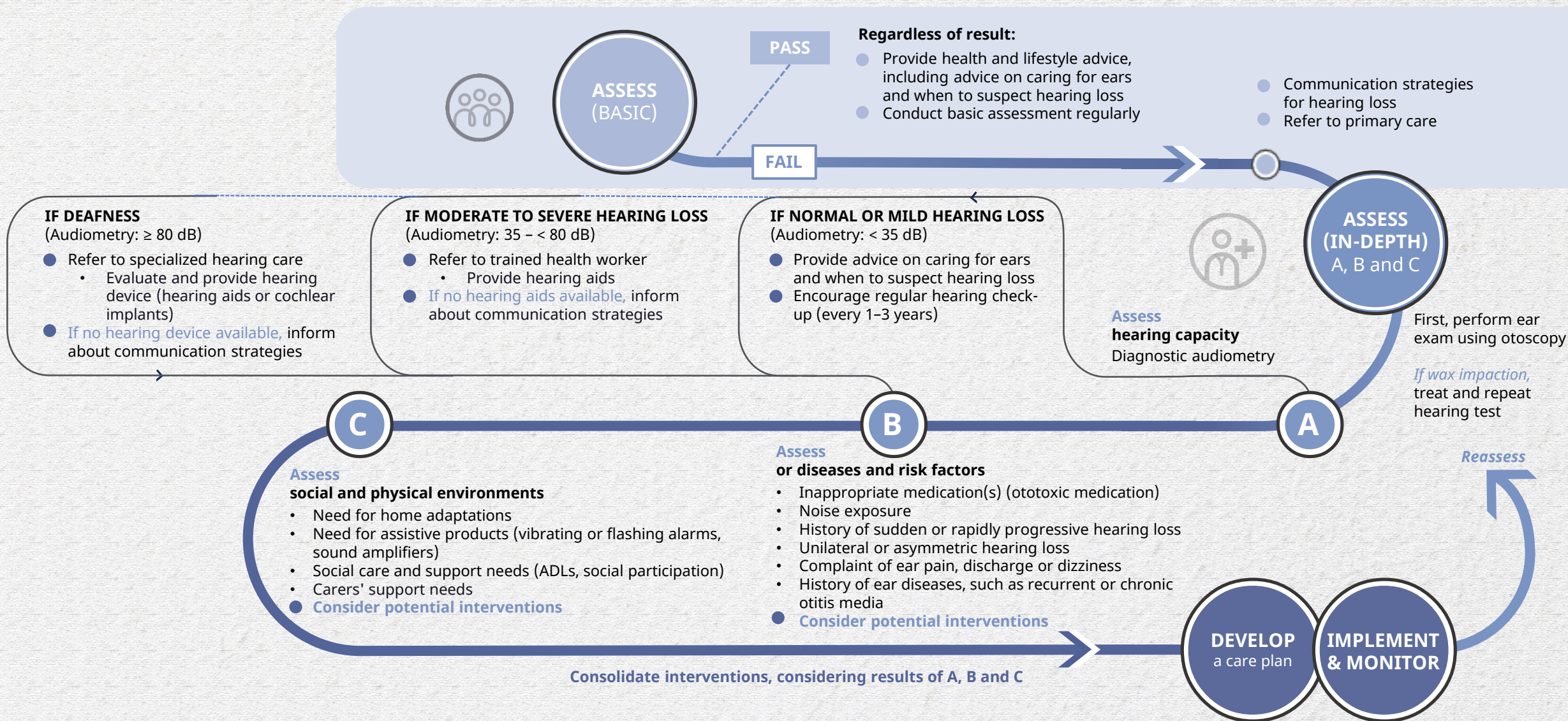
Understanding hearing loss



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- Hearing loss is one of the most common sensory losses in older people.
- When left untreated, hearing loss can hinder communication, leading to social isolation.
- Hearing loss can be associated with other health issues (e.g., cognitive impairment, depression, anxiety, balance disorders), exposing the individual to increased risk of adverse events.

Care pathway to manage hearing loss





Assessment of ear problems and hearing capacity

Ear exam using otoscopy

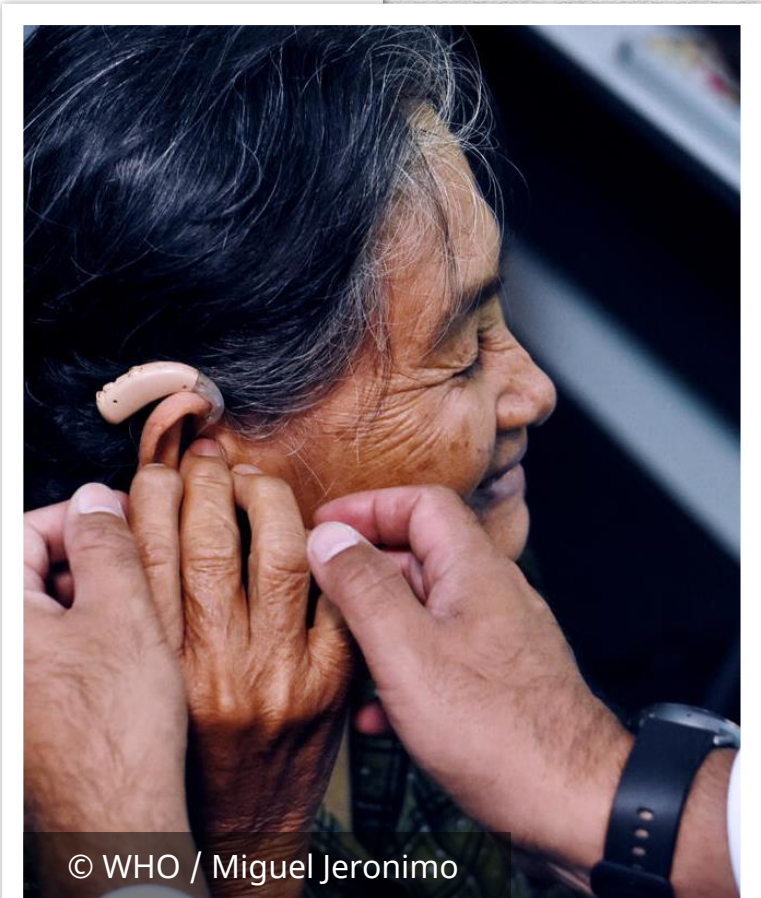
1. Pull the pinna back and upwards to straighten the ear canal, while gently pulling the tragus forward.
2. Shine a light into the ear canal to check for earwax, pus, swelling, redness or foreign bodies.
3. Earwax can be removed by washout.
4. A hearing test should be repeated after earwax removal.

In-depth hearing assessment

- Pure tone audiometry
- Speech audiometry
- Tympanometry

Hearing loss according to severity (in the better hearing ear)

Normal hearing	<20 dB
Mild hearing loss	20–34.9 dB
Moderate to severe hearing loss	35–79.9 dB
Deafness	≥80 dB



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Health and lifestyle advice



For all older people

- Clean the outer ear with a soft cloth.
- Avoid inserting objects into the ears.
- Avoid contaminated water in the ears.
- Do not share earphones or earplugs.
- Protect your ears from loud sounds; use earplugs in noisy areas.
- Get regular hearing check-ups; seek help for ear pain, discharge or hearing issues.

See a health worker if hearing loss is suspected, based on:

- Frequently asking others to repeat themselves
- Increasing the volume on devices
- Having difficulty following conversations in noise
- Having trouble understanding phone calls
- Hearing ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Missing sounds like a doorbell or alarms
- Being told you speak loudly



Community-based health care

Communication strategies

- Give the person your full attention.
- Let them see your face when you speak.
- Ensure there is good lighting on your face.
- Get the person's attention before speaking.
- Reduce background noise or move to a quieter location.
- Speak clearly and at a slower pace. Do not shout.
- Allow the person time to speak.
- Be patient and respectful.
- Use nonverbal signals.
- In groups, encourage people to speak one at a time.
- Do not stop communicating with a person with hearing loss.
- If the person has difficulty speaking, use visual aids.
- Be mindful of reasons for communication challenges that are not related to hearing loss, such as cognitive decline.





Interventions to manage hearing loss

Normal or mild hearing loss

- Provide advice on caring for ears
- Encourage regular hearing check-up (every 1–3 years)

Normal or mild hearing loss

- Inform about communication strategies
- Refer to specialized hearing care for:
 - Fitting hearing aids for moderate hearing loss
 - Evaluation and management of severe hearing loss/deafness and provision and use of hearing device
 - Management of an underlying problem that causes or contributes to hearing loss



If you observe the following red flags, refer to specialized care:

- Sudden or rapidly progressive hearing loss
- Unilateral or asymmetric hearing loss
- Ear pain, ear discharge or dizziness
- History of ear diseases



Interventions for diseases and risk factors



Noise exposure

- Implement environmental modifications.
- Advise on safe listening volume and use of earplugs.



Inappropriate medication(s)

- Conduct a full medication review.
- Adjust medications.
- Refer to specialized care.



Interventions for social and physical environment



Home adaptation

Implement environmental modifications to facilitate communication.



Need for assistive products

- Provide hearing devices.
- Consider phone amplifiers, text messaging devices, and apps.



Social care and support needs

- Promote social interactions.
- Support tasks of daily living.



Carer's support needs

Provide training on how to adapt communication.

Summary



- Simple household and community actions can reduce the impact of hearing loss through effective communication strategies.
- Hearing devices should be provided by trained health workers, following local regulations.
- Specialist referral is needed for:
 - Severe hearing loss or deafness.
 - Red flags: sudden or rapidly worsening loss, unilateral/asymmetric loss, ear pain/discharge, dizziness, history of ear disease.
- Community support:
 - Share information.
 - Adapt communication at events.
 - Create peer support groups..

References

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