

# FACTSHEET

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## Unilateral (single sided) hearing loss: The school child

Children who have been diagnosed by an audiologist as having unilateral hearing loss (deafness in one ear) should be followed up by an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Specialist, or Paediatrician, to check if anything can be done to correct the hearing impairment.

Children with unilateral hearing loss usually have adequate hearing to manage well. There is however some research that indicates that some of these children MAY have problems with:

- learning to read
- spelling and writing stories
- doing maths.

This research found that unless extra help was available from parents, teachers and others, some children had to repeat classes at school.

Children with hearing loss in one ear who do not get extra help may feel at times they are having some difficulties, especially in the classroom. This can be avoided if they are given some extra help at home and at school.

Parents should take comfort from the fact that not all of these children have problems and following the steps described below can prevent or lessen any problems.

### What will I notice at home?

- Children who have unilateral hearing loss can have difficulty hearing if there is background noise such as the TV or a noisy game. However, when they are in a quiet area they seem to hear quite well

- They always like to sit on the same side of you when you are reading a story
- They may find it hard to hear you talk when you are driving and they cannot see your face
- If they get a cold and have temporary congestion in the "good" ear, they can miss much of what is said to them.
- A child who has unilateral hearing loss can have trouble in picking the direction from which sounds are coming. As they hear everything better in the good ear, all sounds will seem to be coming from that side. That could cause them to seem very inconsistent in their response to voices and other sounds.

### What might the teacher notice at school?

- Children who have unilateral hearing loss may seem to ignore the teacher when there is background noise .
- These children may at times seem unable to concentrate and may copy what another child is doing (rather than say they did not hear).
- Important instructions can be missed, especially if homework is given out when the class are packing away their things and there is noise in the room.
- Children who are deaf in one ear may have trouble hearing soft sounds in the classroom such as 's', 'f' and 'th'. This could cause them to have trouble breaking words up into sounds (phonics) for reading and spelling.
- Sometimes these children have trouble in maths if they miss an important step in a maths process.
- They find it hard to understand and talk to other children when there is a lot of noise.

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## What can I do if I think my child is deaf in one ear?

Ask your family doctor to refer your child for a proper hearing test.

Hearing can only be tested properly with special equipment in a sound-proof room. This may be available at:

- Some Community Health Centres
- Some Ear Nose and Throat Specialists' rooms
- Hospital Audiology Departments

## My child has unilateral hearing loss - How can I help?

- Visit your child's classroom and teacher at school often to check on their progress.
- Remind the teachers about your child's hearing at the beginning of each year, or if a new teacher comes.
- Ask that your child be seated with his/her better ear close to the teacher.
- Check homework at home in a quiet area so you find out quickly if there are problems.
- Discuss with your Audiologist whether there is special equipment (eg. Sound Field FM or personal FM unit) which could help your child if there are problems with background noise.
- Your Audiologist should arrange for regular hearing checks to see if there has been any further change in your child's hearing.
- It is important to get treatment quickly for ear infections that will make your child's hearing worse.
- The hearing in your child's "good ear" is very precious. If an operation is advised for that ear, make sure that you understand why it is really necessary. Also ask for expert paediatric E.N.T.specialist care.

### Remember:

- See your doctor quickly for ear infections that will make your child's hearing worse. If your child is hearing badly there may be congestion or infection in the "good ear."
- Visit your child's classroom and teacher at school often to check on your child's progress.