

# Hearing Impairment



Hearing Impairment (HI) refers to a range of experiences where individuals may have partial or total difficulty hearing sounds in one or both ears. This condition can affect how one perceives speech, environmental sound and other auditory information. Functional hearing loss ranges from mild to profound, with various influences and impact on a person's daily interaction.

**HI can be categorized into five degrees based on the range of sound one can hear:**

- **Mild (26-40 dB HL):** Struggles to identify soft sounds, such as whisper
- **Moderate (41-55 dB HL):** Finds conversations hard to follow
- **Moderately severe (56-70 dB HL):** Finds loud noises, such as telephone ringing difficult to be heard
- **Severe (71-90 dB HL):** Only finds over loud sounds audible, such as shouting
- **Profound (over 90 dB HL):** Finds perceiving any sound significantly

Hard-of-hearing refers to people with hearing loss ranging from mild to severe. Deaf people mostly refer to people who have profound hearing loss.

**Individuals with HI may have the following conditions:**

- Experience challenges with language and articulation, impact learning
- Focus closely on the speaker's face and mouth to enhance comprehension
- Have limit responses to environmental sounds and external stimulation may be limited, or require supportive strategies
- Require extra time or repetition to understand verbal exchanges, especially in fast-paced conversations

# Diagnosis and Treatment

In Hong Kong, HI is diagnosed by an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) specialist or audiologist. Services such as sign language interpretation, audiological therapy, and speech therapy can help one to improve communication skills and promote independent living in the community.



## Supporting Students with Hearing Impairment

University life can present unique challenges for individuals with HI, particularly in social communications, academic performance, and emotion well-being. Helpful tips may include:

### Social Communication

- ✓ Communicate in a clear, natural manner without exaggerating mouth movements
- ✓ Engage in face-to-face conversation and encourage speaker(s) to face each other directly during conversation to help improve understanding
- ✓ Encourage the use of assistive listening devices, such as FM systems, personal amplifiers, and alert devices to improve communication in daily situations
- ✓ Position yourself to the side of the listener's better ear to facilitate clearer communication if appropriate
- ✓ Provide important information in writing to reinforce understanding and retention

### Academic Support

- ✓ Allow and provide access to a sign language interpreter for students with needs
- ✓ Allow the use of assistive technologies during classes and examinations
- ✓ Ensure access to real-time transcription services during lectures and discussions
- ✓ Offer appropriate assistance with lecture notes
- ✓ Provide alternative formats for listening components in tests or examinations
- ✓ Provide preferential seating arrangement in classes, such as near the instructor or a loudspeaker

### Psychological Support

- ✓ Refer to psychological counseling service for students' mental health and adversity coping capability

It is essential to recognize that Deaf or Hard-of-hearing individuals have unique strengths and capacity. Fostering an inclusive and supportive environment can empower students to pursue their goals with confidence and resources they need.

### References

SENSE. (2024, Jan 24). Hearing Impairment. <https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/types-of-special-educational-needs/hearing-impairment/introduction.html>

WHO. (2024, Feb 2). Deafness and hearing loss. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss#:~:text=Hearing%20loss%20and%20deafness&text=Hearing%20loss%20may%20be%20mild,ranging%20from%20mild%20to%20severe>