

Audiometric Testing: A Guide for Workers

Do you work in a noisy environment?

Do you need to yell to be heard by co-workers or customers?

Are you required to wear hearing protection at work?

If you answered yes to any of these, you might be at risk of hearing loss.



Exposure to loud noise can permanently harm your hearing. If you work near noisy equipment, loud music, or heavy machinery, you may have an increased risk of noise induced hearing loss.

This type of hearing loss often occurs gradually over time from prolonged noise exposure and, since it doesn't cause pain, it can be difficult to notice the signs until it's too late. Ignoring the problem can further impact your hearing, and negatively affect your overall health and social wellbeing, causing tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in the ears), social isolation, loneliness, frustration, and more.

Getting your hearing tested regularly is one way to identify changes to your hearing and prevent further damage.

Did you know?

Early detection can help you prevent further damage.

By identifying noise induced hearing loss early, you can take steps to reduce your noise exposure and prevent it from worsening. Seeking help to manage your hearing loss can also minimise its impact on your daily life.

What is Audiometric Testing?

Audiometric testing is a type of hearing test. It can measure your ability to hear quiet sounds and, when done regularly, can detect changes in your hearing over time. If you are exposed to high levels of workplace noise, or are frequently required to use personal hearing protection while at work, you should have your hearing tested:

- 1) Within 3 months of starting a new job (often called a 'baseline test'), and
- 2) Every two years from then on.

Some workers may need more frequent testing, such as those who work around explosive sounds.

You should also get tested if you notice changes to your hearing or think you have signs of hearing loss. These can include:

- Often asking people to repeat themselves
- Turning up the volume of the television or radio
- Trouble understanding conversations in noisy places
- Tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in your ears).

Did you know?

In most states and territories, employers are required to arrange regular hearing tests for workers who are frequently required to wear hearing protection at work.

Requirements for testing vary across Australian states and territories, so check your local legislation, or refer to your WHS officer or union representative for more details.

What to expect

Your employer may arrange for a hearing service to visit your workplace, or ask you to visit a hearing or medical centre for a hearing test. Testing is quick and easy, and usually takes about 20 minutes. On the day of the test:

- Your hearing test will be done in a quiet room, away from workplace noise or any other sounds that could affect the result.
- A trained professional will perform the test. This may be an audiologist, or another person trained to conduct audiometric testing.
- The tester will ask about your health, work history, current hearing levels, and past exposure to loud noise.
- You will be asked to listen to sounds played through a set of headphones to measure the quietest sounds you can hear.
- The tester will let you know the results and if any further steps are required.

Did you know?

Audiometric testing is different to the free screenings you might find in shopping centres, pharmacies, and other locations. Free screenings can be useful to identify potential hearing loss, but they are less accurate and can't detect small hearing changes over time.

After testing

Understanding the results of your hearing test is important.

The hearing professional should explain if hearing loss has been detected, and any next steps. If your result is unclear, or you have a significant change in your hearing, you may be referred for additional testing.

You should receive a written record of your test results. You can keep this record to help you track changes to your hearing over time. You can also share with future employers or other medical professionals as needed.

I have hearing loss...what now?

If an audiometric test shows that your hearing has changed, you may be able to pinpoint which workplace activities are causing damage and discuss prevention with your employer. This information might also be used as evidence in workers compensation claims.

If you experience noise induced hearing loss, there are measures that can be put in place to prevent further loss. It is important to remember:

- 1 Your employer must reduce workplace noise and take action to protect your hearing at work.
- 2 Your employer should make reasonable adjustments to your work environment to accommodate your hearing loss.
- 3 A hearing professional can help you manage your hearing loss. This might include advice on ways to hear better in daily life, such as using assistive technology or making lifestyle changes.

Talk to your employer about audiometric testing today.

Learn more: visit hearing.com.au



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