

Cancer Treatment and Your Hearing



Some cancer treatments may harm your ears. Ototoxicity is when a person has hearing problems caused by a medicine. Tinnitus is ringing in your ears. Both can be related to cancer treatment.

Cancer treatments that may cause hearing problems

Chemotherapy. Certain types of chemo can cause inner ear damage. These include:

- Carboplatin
- Cisplatin
- Paclitaxel
- Docetaxel

Radiation therapy. Radiation may damage your hearing if you are getting high doses directed at your head, sinuses, ear, nose, throat, or brain.

Surgery. If you have surgery on your head or brain, you may have hearing problems.

Other common medicines. Some medicines can cause hearing damage. These include certain antibiotics, diuretics, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS). Ask your healthcare provider if any treatments you are receiving put you at risk for hearing problems. You may be at higher risk if you are receiving high doses of chemotherapy. Or if you are receiving chemotherapy and brain radiation therapy together.

Symptoms of ear damage

Symptoms may include:

- Being unable to hear well. You might notice that you need to turn up the sound on your TV or radio, ask people to speak more loudly, or not be able to hear over background noise.
- Ringing ears (tinnitus)
- Vertigo or dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting

Tell your healthcare team if you have any of these symptoms.

Diagnosis

If you have problems hearing, your healthcare provider may:

- **Do a physical exam.** They may look at your ears for blockages, infections, or other problems.
- **Have imaging tests done.** Tests such as CT scan or MRI may be used to diagnose the cause of a hearing problem.
- **Refer you to an audiologist.** This is a healthcare professional who can diagnose and treat hearing problems. They may do an audiogram or other tests to check your hearing.

Preventing and treating ear damage

Hearing loss can't always be prevented. Your healthcare provider may check your hearing or have you see an audiologist before, during, and after your cancer treatment. This is to watch for any changes. It's important that you tell your healthcare provider right away if you have symptoms. Your healthcare provider may adjust your treatment dose, medicine, or schedule. Ask your healthcare provider about other ways to protect your hearing. If needed, your provider may suggest devices to help your hearing, such as hearing aids.

Tried and true methods to protect your hearing include:

- Avoid loud noises.
- Get regular ear exams.
- Turn the volume down on your devices.
- Limit the use of earbuds and headphones.
- Wear earplugs or headphones when exposed to loud sounds.

Cancer treatment can have troubling effects on your hearing. But getting treatment is important. Don't be afraid to talk openly with your healthcare team about possible hearing loss or any other side effects. Your team is always there to help.

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