

# Hearing Screening for Newborns: Why it Matters



Hearing screenings for newborns is very important. In the U.S., a hearing test is usually done on every infant before they leave the hospital. This is part of the universal newborn hearing screening program. The goal of the program is to catch hearing problems as early as possible. If a hearing problem is found early, it can be treated or managed sooner. Treatment before 10 months of age helps with language and reading development.

## Why is hearing important?

Hearing is important because it can affect how your child develops. Good hearing is vital for:

- Speech and language development
- Learning
- Social and emotional development

## What to expect from the screening

The hearing test is usually done as the baby sleeps. It's short and painless. It takes only about 10 minutes. You will likely get the results before you leave the hospital. At that time, you will be told whether your baby needs another test. Needing another test doesn't mean that your child has a hearing problem. But it does mean that the first test didn't give enough information. Your healthcare provider can tell you more. Make sure your baby has all follow-up hearing tests as directed.

Ask for the results if you are ready for discharge and have not been given them. Make sure that they are explained to you before you go home.

## What if my baby has signs of hearing loss?

If the test shows that your baby has signs of hearing loss, don't panic. Many infants need a follow-up exam. A newborn with normal hearing can fail the first test because of crying or moving, or from something in the ear canal. More tests will be done to find out if your child really has hearing loss. Even if your child has a hearing problem, many of these problems can be treated. Your child's healthcare provider will work with you to develop a plan to help your baby.

It's very important to follow up on what the provider advises. Speech and language begin to develop in the first few months of life. It is best to know about your baby's hearing loss. Then you can do many things to help with communication development.

## Can my baby pass the test and still have hearing problems?

It's possible for the test to miss a hearing problem. Some problems may not be caught with this screening. And in some cases, problems show up later. At each well-baby check, the healthcare provider will ask about your child's behavior and their response to sound. So, the best thing to do is check whether your baby is meeting hearing, speech, and language milestones as they grow. Ask your healthcare provider for a list of these milestones. If you have any concerns about your baby's hearing or behavior, write them down and ask the provider.

## How can I learn more?

Learn more about hearing screening from the [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders at www.nidcd.nih.gov](https://www.nidcd.nih.gov).

## Resources

Other online resources you may find helpful include:

- [American Academy of Audiology at www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org)
- [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

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