

About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you how claims for deafness are decided and gives you some information about different types of deafness.

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The War Pensions Scheme is run by Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence. This leaflet gives you general guidance, but it is not a definitive (full) statement of the law. Please remember that the law may change from time to time. This may affect your rights and responsibilities, including whether you are likely to get a War Pension. If you need more advice about anything to do with War Pensions, call

Veterans UK Helpline on 0800 169 22 77

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) contact details

If you need any more advice about anything to do with war pensions, call **Veterans Helpline (UK only)** on: **0800 169 22 77**.

If you have a Textphone you can call **Veterans Helpline (UK only)** on: **0800 169 34 58**.

If you live overseas, phone: **+ 44 1 253 866043**.

You can write to us at:

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency

Norcross

Thornton-Cleveleys

FY5 3WP

You can contact us by E-mail at:

help@spva.gsi.gov.uk

You can find us on the Internet at:

www.veterans-uk.info

About sound

Sound is made up of two important parts.

These are:

- the **pitch** or **frequency**; and
- the **loudness** or **volume**.

Pitch or frequency

Pitch or frequency tells us whether a sound is high or low. Frequency is measured in kiloHertz (kHz).

For example:

- 8 kHz is a high-pitched sound; **and**
- 0.5 kHz is a low-pitched sound.

The human ear is most sensitive to the frequencies 0.5kHz to 8kHz.

Loudness or volume

Loudness or volume is measured in decibels (dB). The louder the sound is, the higher the decibels.

For example:

- a phone ringing across a room makes a sound of about 75 dB; **and**
- an anti-tank gun firing makes a sound of about 86 dB.

The range of frequency and average volume of human speech

The range of frequencies which is important in understanding human speech is between 1 kHz and 3 kHz.

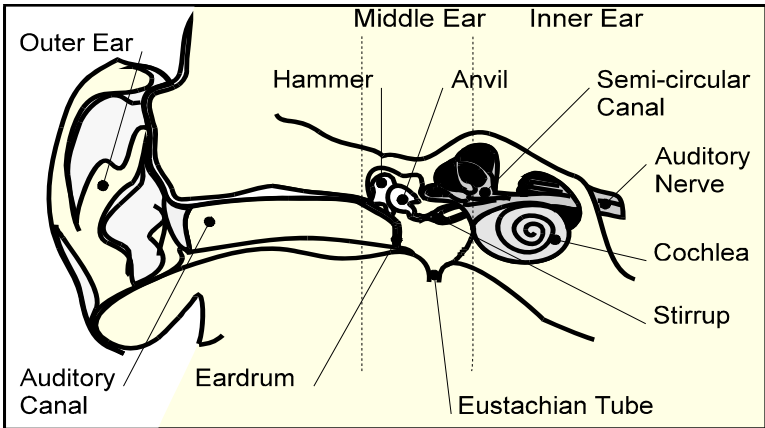
The average volume of human speech is between 50 dB and 70 dB.

Loud sound can damage the human ear and make you deaf. But not everybody reacts in the same way to loud sound. A sound which may damage one person's hearing may not affect another person's hearing.

How we hear

Sound travels through the air as pressure waves.

The **outer ear** helps to direct the sound waves down the **auditory canal** to the **eardrum** which forms the outer limit of the middle ear. This is a space which contains three tiny bones, the hammer, anvil and stirrup. These pass on the sound waves from the eardrum to the cochlear hair cells and the inner ear. From there, electrical signals go through the auditory nerve to the brain. The brain changes these signals into the sounds or noise that we hear.



Different types of hearing loss

There are two types of hearing loss. These are known as:

- sensorineural; **and**
- conductive.

You can suffer from either or both of these.

Sensorineural hearing loss

This type of hearing loss is where your inner ear or auditory nerve does not send electrical signals to your brain properly.

It can be caused by:

- the effects of getting older;
- an inherited condition;
- a fault in the development of your ear before you were born;
- certain illnesses;
- certain medicines or drugs;
- a severe blow to your head or ear; **or**
- very high levels of noise.

Tinnitus

Many people who have sensorineural hearing loss suffer from ringing in their ears. This is called tinnitus.

Noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss

In your inner ear there are 30,000 fine hairs known as **cochlea hair cells**. If you are exposed to very high levels of noise, it can cause permanent damage to these hairs so that electrical signals are not passed to the brain. This can cause the type of deafness which is called noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss.

If you are taken away from the harmful noise, your noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss will not get any worse. So if your hearing was damaged by noise during your service or during wartime, **that** hearing loss will stay the same.

Your **overall** hearing loss may have got worse since you left service or since the war. But this is because of the effects of getting older and perhaps noise from work. Your hearing can also get worse because of illnesses and other conditions that affect your ears.

If you have hearing loss that is a result of noise and you have tinnitus, we may say that your tinnitus is 'part and parcel' of your noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss.

Conductive hearing loss

This type of hearing loss is where your middle ear does not carry sound waves from your eardrum to your inner ear properly.

It can be caused by:

- infections like otitis media;
- inherited conditions like otosclerosis;
- a fault in the development of your ear before you were born;
- a severe blow to your head or ear; **or**
- being in an explosion.

Otitis media

Otitis media is an infection in your middle ear. It can be short lived or long lasting. It can cause discharge, perforated eardrums and conductive hearing loss.

Otosclerosis

Otosclerosis is an inherited condition which affects the chain of three tiny bones in your middle ear. It causes conductive hearing loss. It is not caused or made worse by noise.

Hearing tests

To help us decide your claim, we may have asked you to go for a hearing test. There are two types of hearing test. These are:

- a pure-tone audiogram; **and**
- an evoked-response audiogram.

Pure-tone audiograms

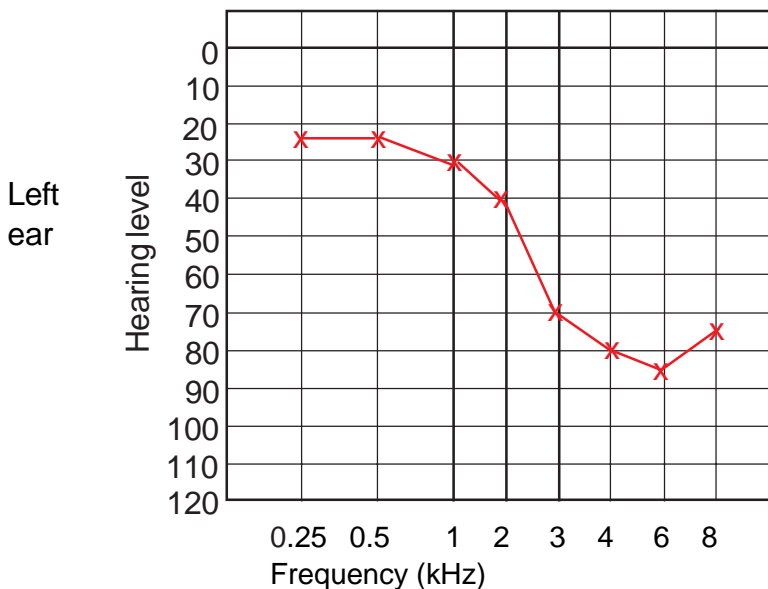
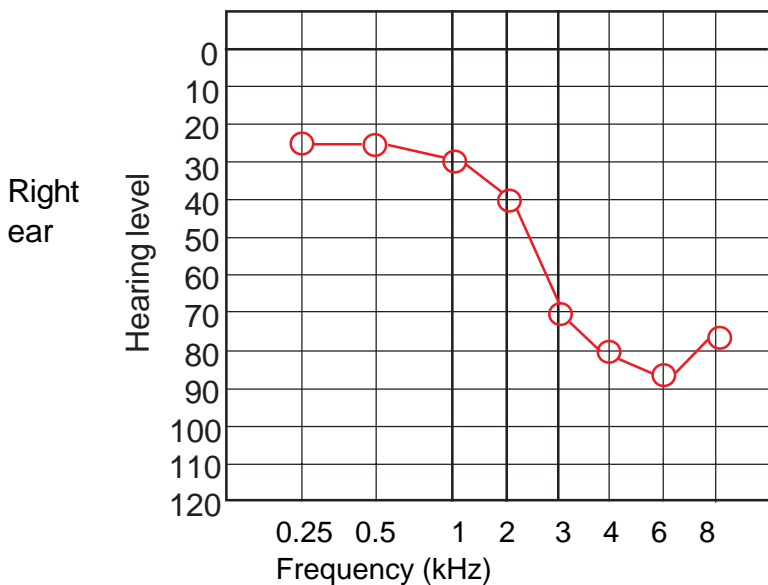
A pure-tone audiogram is a test that measures your ability to hear sounds played through a pair of headphones. Each ear is tested separately and an instrument plots out a graph of the results.

Different types of hearing loss give different graph patterns. The examples on page 11 show the shape of graph produced when hearing loss is noise-induced.

Evoked-response audiograms

An evoked-response audiogram is used when it is difficult to get an accurate pure-tone audiogram. Again, sounds are played through headphones and each ear is tested separately. In this case, brain waves are then recorded and a tracing produced. A hearing expert uses these results to assess hearing.

Example of audiogram results



This is an example only.

How we have made the decision on your claim

Deciding what you are entitled to

We decide whether you are entitled to a war pension. Our administrative staff will get details about your service or the wartime incident that you claim has caused your hearing loss.

If your claim is for noise-induced hearing loss, they must confirm that you were exposed to some form of harmful noise during your service. This could be something like gunfire, aircraft engine noise or an explosion.

If the details confirm this, they give your case to one of our doctors. The doctor looks at your audiogram and all the other medical information in your file and decides the medical cause for your hearing loss.

If your audiogram shows noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss, we then decide whether this was caused by your service or wartime experiences.

Your audiogram may show other causes of deafness like conductive hearing loss. This type of hearing loss is often a result of something other than loud noise. We decide whether this other type of hearing loss is connected to your service or wartime experiences.

If your details do not confirm that you were exposed to some form of harmful noise during service, we will have to turn down your claim.

We make the decision under the laws that govern war pensions.

If we decide that your hearing loss is not related to your service or wartime experiences, we tell you that your claim has not been successful.

If we decide that some or all of your hearing loss is related to your service or wartime experiences, the doctor works out the assessment. We then tell you about our decision and whether you will get any money.

Deciding your assessment

Under the War Pensions Scheme, your assessment can only include hearing loss that is due to service or wartime experiences. If you have hearing loss which is due to any other causes, such as ageing, we cannot include that in your assessment.

The doctor looks very carefully at all of the information we have before deciding your assessment. The doctor uses an audiogram from, or near, the date you were released from service to work out your assessment. They will do this by working out the average of your hearing loss in decibels over 1,2 and 3 kHz in each ear.

On the advice of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council and the British Association of Otolaryngologists who are ear and hearing specialists, these results are then applied to a table used by the Department for assessing noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss under both the War Pension Scheme and the Industrial Injuries Scheme.

☐ How we have made the decision on your claim

War Pensions' law sets out the method of assessment that we use under the War Pensions Scheme.

Assessments have to be made in percentage bands.

The first three bands cover disabilities that are assessed at 1 to 5%, 6 to 14% and 15 to 19%. Once the disability reaches 20%, the bands increase in 10% steps to a maximum of 100%.

We explained earlier on page 8 that hearing loss that is caused by noise does not get worse when the noise is taken away.

If you have noise-induced hearing loss as a result of service or wartime experiences, the doctor may call the assessment of your hearing loss a final assessment.

This means that we do not expect your noise-induced hearing loss as a result of service or wartime experiences to get any better or any worse.

We cannot pay you any money if:

- you have noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss which is a result of your service or wartime experiences; **and**
- our doctors assess this hearing loss at less than 20%.

We cannot pay you any money if:

- you have tinnitus;
- tinnitus is 'part and parcel' of your noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss which is a result of your service or wartime experiences; **and**
- our doctors assess this hearing loss on its own at less than 20%.

Other war-pensioned disablements

If:

- you have an assessment for any other war-pensioned disablement; **and**
- we accept that you have noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss with an assessment of less than 20%;

we cannot add the two assessments together or take into account any conditions or symptoms, such as tinnitus, relating to your hearing loss.

If your hearing loss gets worse

As we said on page 8, sensorineural hearing loss as a result of noise from service or wartime experiences will not get worse. Your overall hearing loss may get worse after service, but this will be because of something which is not connected with service.

If you have an accepted hearing condition that was not caused by noise, you should tell us if anything about your disablement changes.

About the decision

What do I do if I want to know more about the reasons for your decision?

If you want more information about the reasons for our decision, please write to us at the address we have shown on page 3.

What to do if you think our decision is wrong

If you think that our decision is wrong, you can appeal.

The other leaflet we have sent you tells you more about how to do this.

You cannot appeal if we do not pay a war pension for assessments of less than 20% for noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss, as a result of service. However, you can appeal against the level of assessment.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

The RNID is the largest charity representing the 8.7 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK.

If you want more information, contact:

RNID

19 - 23 Featherstone Street

London

EC1Y 8SL

Tel: **0808 808 0123**

Text: **0808 808 0007**

Fax: **020 7296 8199**

E-mail: **informationline@rnid.org.uk**

Web: **www.rnid.org.uk**

Open government

The Agency is committed to the principles of Open Government as set out in the **Code of Practice on Access to Government Information** and the **Freedom of Information Act**. The Freedom of Information Act came fully into effect on 1st January 2005 and is available to view on the Internet at www.foi.mod.uk.

The **Data Protection Act** came into force in July 1998 and regulates the processing of personal information, granting individuals certain rights regarding personal data. A copy of the Data Protection Act 1998 is available to view on the Internet at www.dataprotection.gov.uk.

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency will be happy to answer your questions and give you any information you need.

If you want more information, please write to:

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
Freedom of Information Officer
Norcross
Thornton-Cleveleys
FY5 3WP
England

When you write to or phone us you need to explain the information you want and give your name, address and National Insurance number (if you know it).

