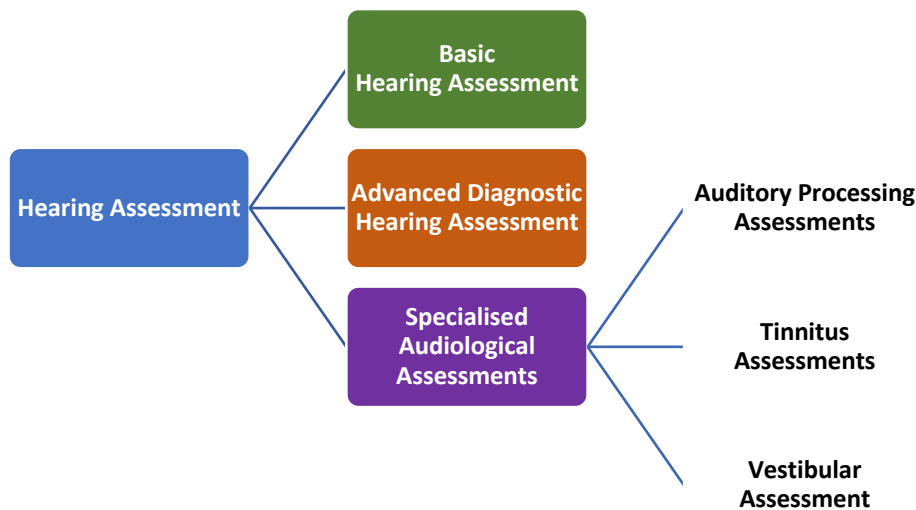


Hearing Assessments

Hearing assessments are conducted to determine if you have a hearing loss, monitor the progression of hearing loss, identify the type of hearing loss, and, in some cases, investigate potential underlying conditions that may be causing changes in your hearing. Various options are available for hearing assessments, each serving specific purposes.

This information sheet aims to provide **an overview of different types of hearing assessments**, ensuring that you are well-informed about the assessment you have undergone and the potential for further tests to provide additional information about your hearing.



Basic Hearing Assessment

A basic hearing assessment is the initial step in evaluating your hearing and is conducted by a university-qualified audiologist, TAFE-qualified audiometrist, or a nurse specialised in audiometry. A basic hearing assessment typically includes the following:

1. Taking your history: This involves discussing your concerns about your hearing, medical history, work and social activities, associated conditions like tinnitus or dizziness, family history of hearing loss, noise exposure, ear infections, and other relevant information.
2. Examination of your ears by the audiologist or audiometrist.
3. Conducting hearing tests in a sound-controlled environment, usually a sound booth or sound proofed room.
4. Tests involving responses to tones and words. This is where the audiologist or audiometrist will identify the softest sounds you can hear in each ear. They also may use noise to distract one ear while testing the other to get ear-specific information.

5. Tests of middle ear function. These tests assess the function of the middle ear by gently placing a probe in your ear canal, which creates variations in air pressure. By measuring how your ear responds to these pressure changes, the test provides valuable information about the health of your middle ear. During the test, you won't need to respond or do anything actively. The probe simply generates different levels of air pressure, and the equipment measures the corresponding changes in your ear. It's a painless procedure that helps healthcare professionals understand how your middle ear is functioning and can provide insights into potential issues that may affect your hearing.

From these tests the audiologist will determine if any hearing loss is present, the degree of hearing loss, the type of hearing loss, and recommend next steps such as further testing, referral for specialist medical opinion, hearing rehabilitation (including hearing devices), or monitoring.

You will be able to request a copy of your hearing test results. However, if you seek a second opinion, the second audiologist or audiometrist will likely want to repeat the testing to ensure accuracy and repeatability of the results obtained.

A comprehensive basic hearing evaluation usually takes at least 45 minutes and should be conducted by a qualified professional in audiology or audiometry. The professional's time and expertise need to be compensated. In some cases, private health funds may partially cover the assessment cost. If an ENT specialist requests the assessment, Medicare may cover the cost or part of it. General practitioners may also request hearing assessments under a Chronic Disease Management Plan, which falls under Medicare. Additionally, some public hospitals offer either free or Medicare-billed hearing assessment services.

Advanced Diagnostic Hearing Assessment

An advanced diagnostic assessment can be performed by a university-qualified audiologist. Advanced tests of auditory function are conducted to determine the specific part of the hearing system that is not functioning properly. These tests may include measuring the brain's response to sound using electrodes placed on the scalp and near the ears. Other advanced tests might examine how each ear responds to loud sounds, the clarity of speech at higher volumes, or the reactions of individual parts of the ear and hearing system to sound.

Advanced tests are conducted after a basic hearing assessment if the results are inconclusive or indicate patterns suggesting that specialised testing will aid in diagnosing a particular condition or planning a rehabilitation program.

Specialised Audiological Assessments

Specialised audiological assessments are conducted by university-qualified audiologists or other professionals with specialised training. These assessments focus on specific aspects of hearing or associated conditions. Examples of specialised audiological assessments include:

1. **Auditory Processing Assessments:** These tests determine if information from both ears is being filtered and combined properly at different stages of the complex auditory pathway. Tests may involve listening to rapid speech, speech presented in various types and levels of noise, sentence tests where different parts are sent to each ear, memory for sound and speech, and the ability to fill in missing gaps. Auditory processing assessments may combine physiological measures (using scalp electrodes to monitor brain activity patterns) and behavioural measures (requiring you to respond and participate in tasks). The specific tests conducted depend on the purpose of the specialised assessment.
2. **Tinnitus Assessments:** These assessments evaluate tinnitus (ringing in the ear/s) to determine suitable interventions or monitor the effectiveness of existing interventions. They may involve matching the type and loudness of the tinnitus sound and determining if the tinnitus can be masked by other sounds. Additionally, a questionnaire may be included to assess how tinnitus affects lifestyle and functioning.
3. **Vestibular Assessment:** Vestibular assessments evaluate the balance system, which is the result of interactions between the inner ear and the brain. These assessments typically involve a series of tests that include tracking lights and inducing dizziness through temperature changes in the ear. Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialists and Neurologists often use vestibular assessment results to help diagnose conditions related to the ear and brain.

Please note that the above descriptions provide a general understanding of various hearing assessments and their purposes. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional for personalised advice and to determine the most appropriate assessment for your specific needs.

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