



Sound sensitivities (hyperacusis) in children

Information for parents from the East Kent Children's Hearing Service

We have written this factsheet to give you more information about sound sensitivities in children. It explains:

- what sound sensitivities are; and
- ways to support your child.

We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What are sound sensitivities?

Like adults, children may be sensitive to certain sounds. For example, loud, irregular sounds such as hand dryers and vacuum cleaners. Some children may also find prolonged loud noises, such as at a concert, too much. This type of sensitivity to sound is common in children and usually disappears as they get older.

What is hyperacusis?

Hyperacusis is when common, everyday sounds seem much louder than they should. This hypersensitivity to sound can be uncomfortable or sometimes even painful. It can also affect one or both ears, and it can come on suddenly or develop over time.

Hyperacusis can be extremely distressing for some children. It may trigger avoidance behaviours, which are actions a person takes to escape from difficult thoughts and feelings. This can affect a child's general wellbeing and day-to-day life.

Who is affected by hyperacusis?

Hyperacusis can affect people of all ages, including adults. It is most common in young children and people with additional needs, such as autism.

Children who suffer from glue ear may also experience hyperacusis. This is because their hearing levels are only temporarily reduced, so when their hearing improves, normal everyday sounds can often seem much louder.

What signs should I look out for?

When confronted with loud noises, children with hyperacusis may:

- cry
- cover their ears with their hands
- panic, or become angry or distressed
- try to avoid the sounds, for example by leaving the room or turning off the television.

How can I help my child manage their sound sensitivity?

The good news is when managed sympathetically, this problem usually lessens with time.

- It is important to acknowledge your child's intolerance to certain sounds. However, you should not focus on it or promote avoidance behaviours. Instead, focus on an enjoyable aspect of the sound with your child. This can include the colourful lights of the fireworks or the colours on an emergency vehicle.
- Reassure your child by explaining where the sound that is distressing them is coming from.
- Comfort your child and take them away from the sound if necessary. It is good to get your child used to the sound. If they are particularly distressed, forcing them to stay close to the sound may not be helpful.
- Where possible, avoid giving your child ear plugs or ear defenders. Using earplugs can cause your child's ears to become more sensitive, as they get used to a reduced level of sound.
- Repeated gentle exposure to the noise may help reduce your child's reaction to it. For example record distressing sounds, such as sirens, on your mobile phone and allow your child to control the volume themselves.
- Where you can, use warning words to prepare your child before a loud sound starts.
- Encourage your child to make sounds they have control of. For example, clapping, banging a drum, playing with noisy toys, and turning on a vacuum cleaner themselves.
- Play some gentle background sounds or music to your child when in a quiet place. This helps to increase the background volume, making sudden loud sounds less of a shock.

How can I help my child to relax?

Being able to help your child relax is important in managing the stress often linked with hyperacusis. It can help your child to reduce any physical anxiety response to hyperacusis.

There are various relaxation techniques which you can try.

- **Breathing exercises**

Encourage your child to take deep breaths in, hold and breathe out. Find a rate that is comfortable for your child.

- **Muscle-relaxing exercises**

Get your child to stretch their arms above their head as tall as they can get, on to their tiptoes if they can, and then flop down and let their body fold forwards. Repeat this a few times to help relax their muscles.

It is also important that your child is physically active every day, and that they have a good sleep routine to help reduce anxiety.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

- East Kent Children Hearing Service
Telephone: **01227 866487**
Email (ekh-tr.eastkentchildrenshearingservice@nhs.net)

Useful web sites

- Cbeebies: seven techniques for helping kids keep calm (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/seven-techniques-for-helping-kids-keep-calm>)
- Young minds: parents A to Z mental health guide (<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/>)

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Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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