

AUDIOGRAM or HEARING SCREENING TEST: Which is What? Is there Really a Difference?

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From time to time, we see publicities offering a free hearing screening test. While a hearing screening test is usually offered free of charge and completed within less than 10 minutes, it is different from a full, comprehensive hearing evaluation.

By definition, a hearing screening test is typically designed to obtain information regarding the status of hearing in a particular group of people. A pass/fail criteria is established, for example: at 25 decibels, do you hear the sounds of different frequencies (pitches)

which are being presented? If you do, then the screening result is a “pass”; if you do not, even if it is only for one amongst the many sounds presented, the result is a “fail” and is followed by a referral to have a thorough hearing assessment.



Margaret Barkman, a Hear Québec member, was sponsored to get her hearing tested in honor of World Hearing Day and May Hearing Month



Hear Québec member Anastasia Kokinasidis showing us how fun and easy it can be to get your hearing tested!

WHO COMPLETES A HEARING SCREENING TEST?

Anybody who receives minimal training to handle the equipment can complete a hearing screening test. No specific certification is required at this level. There are even some software tools which will determine a pass/fail response when being used. Most commonly, hearing aid acousticians will offer this screening level of service, but nurses will also give this test and so will certified audiologists in some cases.

AUDIOGRAM VS. HEARING SCREENING TEST

An audiogram is much more thorough than a screening test. It will typically begin with a gathering of information regarding your complaints, relevant information about your medical history (mainly focused on any ear issues such as infections, tinnitus, blockages, vertigo, dizziness, family history of hearing loss, or other hearing problems), and some general health information about factors which can influence your hearing condition.

An assessment of your hearing is then completed through the measurement of the thresholds for pure tones (using headphones as well as bone conduction) and for speech, followed by your ability to repeat words at a comfortable loudness level in a controlled environment (a soundproof booth).

The hearing assessment will also include an otoscopic examination (looking in your ear canals) to rule out the presence of occluding cerumen (wax) as well as a

tympanometric test which allows us to measure the mobility of the eardrum and the pressure of air within the middle ear cavity.

These different tests allow health professionals to not only determine the absence or presence of a hearing loss but also the cause of the damage (if any) and what treatment may be possible to reverse a condition if present.

Once these tests are completed, custom-tailored recommendations and follow up interventions are discussed with you.

WHO COMPLETES AN AUDIOGRAM

Certified audiologists who hold a master's degree are trained in the field of hearing and balance health and therefore are the ones certified to perform this type of evaluation. They can orient the client toward the appropriate resources following the identification of a hearing loss.

The Québec RAMQ medicare program provides access to hearing aids if your hearing loss is severe enough to meet their minimal criteria: an average of 35 decibels measured at the frequencies of 500, 1000 & 2000Hz. For RAMQ coverage, the hearing assessment has to be completed by a certified audiologist, and it has to include a global evaluation of your needs. Beyond the hearing aids, you may need assistive listening devices that have to be recommended by the audiologist as well.



WHY TAKE THE TIME TO MEET WITH AN AUDIOLOGIST TO HAVE AN AUDIOGRAM IF I CAN GET A QUICK CHECK FASTER AND FREE OF CHARGE?

The audiologist is not interested only in the fact that you may or may not have a hearing loss. They are looking at your overall hearing health and will take into account many other factors such as:

- If you hear tinnitus (ringing), and if so how are you coping with it?
- Whether you could have Eustachian tube dysfunction? Do you need to consult an ENT specialist about it? or complete some exercises to improve the situation?
- If your vision has become blurred, could it be in relation to some vestibular dysfunction (the vestibule is the balance system located in the ear)?

- Whether you could still benefit from the use of hearing aids even if your hearing loss does not qualify you to be covered for hearing aids through the medicare program?
- If you do not have a hearing loss which could be aided with traditional hearing aids, could another technology be helpful such as a bone-anchored hearing aid (BAHA) or a cochlear implant?
- Which communication strategies can help you to better cope with your hearing loss?
- Where can you find the support and help to better function with your hearing loss?
- How can you prevent further degradation of your hearing?

Healthy hearing allows us to connect with the people around us. It deserves the best care that we can get. Therefore, the audiologist is a pivotal member of your hearing health team!



President and founder of Audiology Centre West and a graduate from the University of Montreal in 1984 with a master's degree in speech-language pathology and audiology, Ms. Auger has worked many years in the public health system in both hospital and rehabilitation centres prior to founding Audiology Centre West inc.

She is an assistant professor and guest speaker at the University of Montreal and at the University of Ottawa. She is also regularly invited to lecture on the topics of tinnitus/hyperacusis, vestibular problems, and hearing health for musicians in professional and scientific venues as well as public events.

Ms. Auger works with people with tinnitus, hyperacusis, and vestibular problems and is often called upon to act as an expert in medico-legal files (CNESST, SAAQ, DVA, and others).