



## When Is a Hearing Loss a Hearing Loss?

There is a wealth of evidence that untreated hearing loss is a factor contributing to cognitive decline and dementia in adults. We've written about these and other problems that can develop when people don't seek help for their hearing loss.

### When is a loss "mild"?

Historically, clinicians and researchers have used the term *mild hearing loss* to describe hearing thresholds in the 25-40 decibel (dB HL) range. Hearing levels less than 25 dB HL are usually described as "within the normal range," although the true range of normal hearing is 10 dB HL or better.

**Even minimal hearing loss affects mental function.**

Many audiologists describe thresholds in the 16-25 dB HL range as *minimal hearing loss*. Recently, a investigation studied a large group of people with hearing in this range of minimal hearing loss. The researchers found a strong relationship between hearing and cognitive performance even for individuals with hearing in this range of minimal loss. Hearing at even these slightly reduced levels affected performance on several tests of mental function.

### Help for hearing loss

These were studies of *untreated* hearing loss. There is clear evidence that getting help for hearing loss—almost always through the use of hearing aids—greatly reduces or eliminates the negative effects hearing loss. Hearing aids improve social and family relationships, as well as academic, cognitive and work performance. Most of all, hearing aids make life more enjoyable for you and your family and friends.

## Happy Birthday Beethoven

This year marks the 250<sup>th</sup> year of the birth of Ludwig von Beethoven, one of the great figures of western music. Recognized as a musical genius in his own time, his compositions continue to thrill music lovers today.

Born in 1770, he died in 1827 at the age of 56. He suffered a range of physical ailments, including hearing loss. As he wrote at the age of 30:

*"My hearing has been growing worse. I do not hear the high notes of the instruments. I hardly hear people who speak softly. And yet if anyone shouts I can't bear it."*

Beethoven tried to keep his hearing loss secret, fearing that it would hurt his reputation as a musician.



### What caused Beethoven's hearing loss?

Many specialists have offered theories about the cause of Beethoven's hearing loss. He had a progressive hearing loss, tinnitus, greater loss for high pitches and poor speech understanding. After his death, analysis of his hair strands showed abnormally high levels of lead. We now know there is a relationship between lead exposure and hearing loss. Exposure

to toxic levels of lead is the most widely accepted cause of Beethoven's loss of hearing.

### But was he deaf?

Most of the descriptions of Beethoven's hearing describe him as becoming "totally deaf." However, the "deafness" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not the deafness of today.

There were few options for treating hearing loss in Beethoven's day. He used ear trumpets for many years. After a few years they were no longer helpful.

Today, with the advent of miniaturized microphones, microprocessors, amplifiers, and more, hearing aids and cochlear implants are successful treatments for people with severe hearing loss, including those with no hearing. Would Beethoven have benefitted from 21<sup>st</sup> century hearing aids?

Almost definitely, yes. Beethoven would have been a difficult patient (musicians can present a special challenge). But he would have been someone with a hearing loss, not someone "totally deaf." He would have heard his own music, communicated more easily with the people around him and suffered less depression.

And if Beethoven could have used his remaining hearing—who knows what music he would have created then?

## Your Ears: At Risk for Skin Cancer

This is the time of year we remind you to be careful of the summer sun. As small as our ears are, a third of all skin cancers occur on them.

About 85% of ear skin cancers occur in men. That's probably because of their shorter hair and being out in the sun more often.

Other than staying out of the sun, your best preventative is regular and liberal use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen. Take special care to apply sunscreen to the grooves of the ears. And be sure to include the back of your ear, where a full third of ear skin cancers occur.

## WELCOME

... to the Summer issue of our newsletter. We hope the information is useful to you and to your family and friends.

Our practice is based on these fundamental principles:

- Hearing loss is serious
- Hearing loss deserves professional care
- Hearing aids improve lives

## Hear For Yourself

It's very difficult for someone with normal hearing to understand what it's like to have a hearing loss. How often have you heard a friend who knows you have a hearing loss, be almost shocked: "You mean you don't hear that?"

To give someone a sense of what it is like to have a hearing loss, ask your family member or friend to go to:

[www.hear-the-world.com/en/knowledge/hearing-loss/what-hearing-loss-sounds-like](http://www.hear-the-world.com/en/knowledge/hearing-loss/what-hearing-loss-sounds-like)

The site simulates various degrees of hearing loss. Of course, it's not the same as truly having hearing loss full-time. The challenges of untreated hearing loss include misunderstanding a friend or spouse, choosing not to go out with

friends, or not going out to the movies. Fortunately, these effects are minimized or eliminated with professional hearing care.

## Wireless Connectivity and Hearing Aids

As many of you know, many hearing aids today use wireless connectivity to communicate with other devices such as a television, cell phone or landline telephone. For example, a wireless transmitter connected to a television set can send the audio signal directly to your hearing aids, eliminating amplification of room noise or other voices.

Hearing aid users can also connect wirelessly to their cell phone. Because

the phone's signal is sent wirelessly to both hearing aids (and both ears), many people with hearing loss can now hear as well or better on their mobile phone than people with normal hearing.

Many hearing aid users can also download an app and use their cell phone as a remote control to change hearing aid programs or adjust hearing aid volume.

### Wax Guards

Most hearing aids have a guard to prevent wax from getting inside the instrument, which greatly reduces hearing aid repairs. If you change batteries and your hearing still doesn't work, it's likely that the guard has become blocked with wax. We can change the wax guard here in the office or mail wax guards so you can change it at home.

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## Hearing Care in a Time of COVID-19

Alert: When taking off a face mask, be careful not to dislodge your hearing aids.

We hope this finds you and your family safe and healthy.

As providers of hearing care, we are committed to both protecting your health and providing your hearing care during these challenging times. We have always followed professional standards for infection control. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, we have instituted additional stringent procedures in accordance with new national guidelines. In addition, if we ask you screening questions or don't shake your hand, we hope you understand.

During these difficult times, communication is more important than ever. We will continue to protect all our patients as we work to make sure you're hearing as well as possible.

Sincerely,

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