

Hearing HealthCare News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends

 Fall 2020

Face Masks and You

We've written previously about how helpful lipreading can be. Almost everyone, whether they have hearing loss or not, gets help from lipreading, even if they don't know it.

We're living in a different world now. With many people wearing face masks, how do you read lips? You don't.

According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* by reporter Sarah Needleman, everyone's having trouble hearing each other. Masks, while important to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, muffle speech. Masks also cover up most of the facial expression people use to interpret meaning. About half of our ability to read emotions comes from seeing the mouth, nose and chin. With much



of the face covered, it's almost as if everyone has a mild hearing loss.

Misunderstandings can lead to frustration and even anger. Needleman gave several examples: "I couldn't understand her, so I just said thank you and left." At a grocery store, a shopper couldn't understand the cashier: "I was embarrassed because I go there often." People with hearing loss understand the temptation to just smile and pretend you understood.

Face masks are causing communication problems and misunderstandings even for people with excellent hearing. These challenges are greater if you have a hearing loss. But here's some good news. Manufacturers are producing face masks with a clear window that preserves most of the lipreading cues. For more information, please call our office.

Suggestions for Your Family and Friends

Most people don't understand what it's like to have a hearing loss. Even if they want to be helpful, people who have normal hearing can't know what it's like to hear but not understand, or to hear well in one situation but not in another.

Although hearing aids are your most important source of help, your family, friends and co-workers can also be helpful. Here are some suggestions you can share with



the people around you.

Be polite. Please get my attention before talking to me. This allows me to "get ready" to listen.

Be in the same room. Please don't speak to me from another room. It's simply too difficult when you're far away and out of sight. I may hear you call me. . . but I won't

understand what you say!

Don't talk fast. I often have to figure out what someone said and I can't keep up with a fast talker. One of my most important tips: *slow down!*

Face me. I understand more easily if I can see your face. And please don't chew gum, smoke or cover your mouth—it makes lipreading much more difficult.

Come closer. When you stand a little closer, your voice is louder and lipreading is much easier. Someone three feet away is twice as easy to understand as someone eight feet away.

Reduce background noise. When you speak with me, please turn off the television, radio or air conditioner. Hearing in noise is *much* harder for me than it is for you!

Just because I heard you doesn't mean I understood you. Hearing is not the same as *understanding*. People who mumble or talk fast are difficult for me. I *hear* them. . . I just don't *understand* them.

We hope you'll show these tips to your family and friends. It could make your life just a little bit easier.

Can You Hear Your Smoke Alarm?

The Fire Protection Research Foundation found that the high-pitched signal used by most smoke alarms failed to awaken 43% of individuals with hearing loss. A strobe light alerting device, used by many people with hearing loss, alerted only 27% of sleeping participants. A pillow vibrating device alerted 80% of participants.

Another disturbing finding was "a high level of misplaced complacency among people who are hard of hearing in terms of their need for specialty alerting devices."

Low-frequency smoke alarms designed specifically for people with hearing loss became commercially available just a few years ago.

The Fire Protection Foundation made the following recommendations for people with hearing loss:

- 1. Don't be complacent!** Test your home smoke alarm. Can you hear it without your hearing aids? Would you be alerted while asleep?
- 2. Don't depend on a strobe light device.** These were found to be ineffective alerting devices.
- 3. Consider purchasing a bed or pillow shaker alarm** if you can't hear your current smoke alarm, consider purchasing a pillow shaker or one of the new low-frequency smoke alarms now available.

WELCOME

. . . to this issue of our newsletter. We hope the information is useful to you and 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**

Do You Have A Doctor's Appointment?

Poor communication is one of the leading factors of errors in medical diagnoses and treatments.

Hearing loss can get in the way of communication between you and your physician. And with many medical caregivers wearing masks and face shields these days, hearing and understanding can be even more of a challenge. Here are some suggestions for effective communication:

Let your medical caretaker know you have a hearing loss. This alerts your physician or other specialist to make an extra effort to communicate clearly.

If necessary, make suggestions to make hearing and understanding easier for you. The nurse, physician's assistant or physician may not know that turning away, putting a chart in front of his or her face or talking while looking down makes it more difficult for you to understand.

Ask for written information and instructions. This is a good idea even if you have excellent hearing. Many people have difficulty remembering information and instructions following a visit to the doctor's office.

Repeat the question if necessary. Asking, "Doctor, did you ask me how long I've had this cough?" is better than guessing at what was asked.

If in doubt, ask for another set of ears. It's a challenge to hear, understand and remember everything that's said, even in the best of circumstances. Asking a family member, friend, caregiver or interpreter to accompany you should reduce both the stress and the possibility of a serious misunderstanding.

Hearing Care and COVID-19

We have always followed strict procedures for infection control. Because of the coronavirus, we have instituted additional stringent procedures in accordance with national and professional guidelines. We will protect our patients as we work to make sure you're hearing as well as possible.

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Hearing Care

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

We hope you're enjoying our newsletter and finding the information useful.

We call our newsletter Hearing HealthCare News. It's not Hearing HealthCure News. That's because hearing loss is seldom cured.

Yes, hearing loss caused by ear wax and ear infection can be cured. But in most cases, especially in adults, hearing loss can't be treated medically.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of help available today. Our job is to provide that hearing care for you. Our goal is to help you hear as well as possible, including in challenging places such as groups of people.

We also believe it's important for you to understand the nature of hearing loss and the different kinds of help available. The care we can provide is better than ever—and we consider our newsletter part of that care.

Sincerely,

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