

Hearing HealthCare News®

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Summer 2022

The Invisible Problem

Hearing loss is one of the most common health problems in this country (along with arthritis and hypertension). But hearing loss is probably the most undetected and most untreated problem in adults.

Unfortunately, the person with the hearing problem is usually the last one to know. As a result, he or she may put off getting help for several years, even when their family, friends and co-workers complain.

Understanding four common characteristics of hearing loss may explain why hearing loss often goes undetected.

Gradual. Hearing loss usually develops so slowly that you're not aware of any change from year to year. A loss of one decibel of hearing each year is not noticeable—that's a daily change of about .001 percent of your hearing! But 10 or 20 years of gradual loss can lead to a very significant—yet unnoticed—hearing problem.

Partial. Adults usually develop a hearing loss for sounds in the speech clarity range, but still have normal hearing for the loudness of speech and for many of the sounds around them. That's why someone with early onset hearing loss may say, "I can hear people talking...I just can't understand them."

Painless. Usually there is no feeling or sensation that alerts you to a change in hearing.

Invisible. You can't detect hearing loss by looking in someone's ears. Only a hearing examination can determine whether hearing loss is present.

Because of these characteristics, it's understandable that someone in the early stages of early hearing loss often believes there is no problem, despite what family and friends say. Unfortunately, the person may then put off getting help for several years, which can lead to family tension and stress. When they finally choose to "hear better," they almost always say, "I should have done this years ago."

If you think you know someone who has an undetected hearing loss, please ask him or her to read this article. The first step is not to get hearing aids, but simply to have a hearing examination. We've never heard anyone complain if the results indicate normal hearing!

Common Myths About Hearing Loss

There are a lot of misunderstandings about hearing loss. Here are a few:

Hearing problems are rare

Hearing loss is actually very common, affecting about 10% of adults. It's also one of the most common chronic conditions in people over 50 years of age. Because it's invisible, someone with a hearing loss doesn't look any different—you probably walk by people with hearing loss every day and don't notice it (or their hearing aids).

Hearing loss is a sign of old age

It's true that hearing loss occurs more often in the over-50 age group. But hearing loss also occurs in infants and children. The difference is that children almost always get early treatment, while adults tend to put off getting help for several years. This can make it more difficult to adjust to hearing aids and create stress and tension with family and friends.

You can't test hearing in young children

Almost all newborns have their hearing screened *before they leave the hospital*. The test uses computer-generated sounds to measure the automatic response of the ear to sound. More than 95% of babies born in the United States receive this hearing screening.

The purpose of early identification is to begin treatment as soon as possible. Treatment includes medical and audiologic evaluation, amplification (hearing aids or cochlear implants),

speech and language therapy, family counseling and early education.

Alexander Graham Bell invented the hearing aid

Not exactly—he invented the telephone as a teaching device for deaf students. But many of the devices developed for the telephone were vital in the development of the first electrical hearing aids in the early 1900's.

Later developments, such as the transistor and the microchip, eventually led hearing aids into the digital age. Thanks to 21st century technology, we now have hearing aids that are custom-fit to each individual hearing pattern, respond automatically to the sounds around them, amplify soft sounds but not loud sounds, distinguish between speech and noise and connect wirelessly to other devices.

If people didn't mumble, I wouldn't have difficulty hearing

For most people with hearing loss, the clarity of speech is more of a problem than loudness. Sensorineural hearing loss—the type most commonly seen in adults—causes distortion of the speech sounds.

Digital hearing aids help by amplifying sounds you *don't* hear, while not amplifying sounds you *do* hear. They can amplify soft sounds a lot while amplifying loud sounds much less (or not at all).

(continued on other side)



It's vital that children receive the best hearing care possible.

WELCOME

... to the Summer issue of our newsletter. We hope you find the information helpful 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**

Wax guards

If you change (or recharge) your hearing aid batteries and the hearing aid still doesn't work, the speaker may be blocked with ear wax, moisture or dust. Most hearing aids have a wax guard to prevent wax and moisture from getting inside. You can change the wax guard at home, or we will be happy to change it in the office.

(from other side)

What hearing aids cannot do, however, is restore normal hearing. On the other hand, with today's high-tech hearing aids and professional care, even those with significant hearing loss are able to hear fairly well *most of the time*. Maybe not in noisy places . . . but *most of the time*.

Hearing aids just make sound louder

Not at all. Today's digital hearing aids are as different from the hearing aids of years ago as today's cars are different from a Model T Ford. Ultra-high speed digital processing, directional microphones, speech algorithms, noise suppression and wireless connectivity have enabled people with hearing loss to hear better than ever, even in challenging settings.

Hearing loss is just something that happens as we get older, so why do anything about it?

With that kind of thinking, why would anyone use reading glasses? Not too many people put up with "fuzzy vision" just because they became farsighted as they got older. Unfortunately, many people put up with "fuzzy hearing." And they don't have to.

A better question is: *what are the benefits of getting help?* Untreated hearing loss has negative effects on overall health, balance, social isolation, and brain health. The benefits are clear: of course, you hear better, and your family and friends are happier being around you. But you may also feel less tired, be more social, and help keep your brain healthy.

Definition of a Hearing Aid

- A miniature electronic device that's always too large
- A tiny amplifier that must amplify sound a million times but bring in no noise
- A device that should amplify only those voices you want to hear at that moment
- A complex, custom-fit electronic device that works in an environment of perspiration, humidity, ear wax and repeated handling
- Something you put off getting for years, but can't do without for 30 minutes when it needs servicing.

adapted from S. Lybarger

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What Is Tinnitus?

The perception of noises within the ears or head (e.g., ringing, buzzing, whooshing, roaring, crickets, etc.) in the absence of an external sound. Approximately 30 million Americans experience tinnitus on a regular basis.

Treatment

The first step is always a hearing test. The audiologist will take a case history in order to obtain specific information regarding the patient's tinnitus as well as administer a hearing evaluation. Often, questionnaires are administered to obtain additional information about how the tinnitus may be affecting the patient's quality of life.

Tinnitus is common in patients with hearing loss. For patients with hearing loss, the audiologist can help to determine whether a hearing aid will help to reduce tinnitus as well as improve hearing.

Sincerely,

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