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What You Need to Hear about Hearing Health and How Your Audiologist Can Help



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IMPORTANT HEARING FACTS

Hearing is a gift that enables us to engage in the world of sound around us. It offers us both comfort (the soothing sound of a mother's lullaby) and protection (a fire alarm), while enabling us to learn, to share ideas and to enjoy pleasures like music, nature and conversations with friends and loved ones.

Damage to the inner ear from loud noise, aging, exposure to ototoxic drugs and certain medical conditions can reduce our ability to hear—often happening so slowly and subtly that others may notice the change in our hearing before we do.

It is estimated that more than 30 million Americans have a hearing loss (approximately 1 out of 10 people). Hearing loss affects people of all ages. In fact 65 percent of people with hearing loss are younger

than age 65! One in six baby boomers have a hearing problem. One in fourteen Generation Xers already have hearing loss. At least 1.4 million children have hearing problems (source: Better Hearing Institute).

SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HEARING LOSS AND TREATMENT

“My particular type of hearing loss is untreatable.”

This is unlikely. In most cases, hearing loss due to nerve damage in the ears can be helped through amplification. Other types of hearing impairments may be medically or surgically treatable.

“Wearing hearing aids is a sign of old age.”

Actually, more people will notice your hearing loss than will notice your hearing aids. Avoiding conversations, answering questions inappropriately, asking to have the TV volume turned up and asking people to repeat themselves are all more conspicuous than a small device in your ears.

“With today's hearing aids, I'll be able to hear perfectly.”

Although the technology has improved tremendously in recent years, hearing aids still do not restore normal hearing. They aid in hearing. That said, most hearing aid users report significant improvements in hearing ability and quality of life through the use of hearing aids.





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AUDIOLOGISTS ARE HEAR FOR YOU

Hearing loss can be difficult to accept at any age, but there is help available. Contact an audiologist in your area for a complete diagnostic evaluation and advice about the best method of treatment. An audiologist is a state-licensed healthcare professional who specializes in evaluating the hearing of adults, infants and children, and in implementing appropriate corrective treatment via hearing aids, rehabilitative services or other technological means as needed. Some audiologists also specialize in the assessment and treatment of balance disorders and tinnitus (ringing in the ears).

Healthcare plans may provide coverage for a baseline hearing test, and most insurance companies recognize audiologists as preferred providers of hearing health services. For Medicare recipients, a hearing evaluation is a covered benefit when ordered by your physician for diagnostic purposes. Today, a Doctor of Audiology degree (Au.D.) is required to become an audiologist, although many competent and long-experienced professionals may have earned a different degree such as a Master’s degree or a Ph.D. There have been substantial advances in hearing assistance technologies over the past several years. Your audiologist will be able to determine the nature of your hearing problem and recommend the most appropriate action for you.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED MY HEARING EVALUATED?

- Do you often feel like people are mumbling?
- Do you have difficulty talking on the phone or listening to the TV or radio?
- Do you complain that you hear people, but you don’t understand what they are saying?
- When you are with other people do you wish you could hear better?
- Do others complain that you have a hearing problem?
- Do you have trouble understanding conversation if there is background noise?
- Do you frequently need to ask other people to repeat what they have said to you?
- Do you avoid social activities where you need to hear well?
- Do you have ringing in your ears?
- Do you have a history of ear infections?
- Do you experience dizziness?
- Do you have a family history of hearing loss?
- Do you have any history of exposure to loud noise in recreational activities, at work, or in the military?



If you answered YES to any of the questions above, you should consider undergoing a complete hearing evaluation performed by a licensed audiologist in your area (visit www.audiologist.org to find an audiologist near you). In addition, both children and adults are encouraged to have hearing tests every two to three years to help detect hearing loss. Annual hearing checkups are recommended for those who are exposed to potentially damaging loud noises such as farmers, hunters, machinists, musicians, airline workers, and carpenters.



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WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTHY HEARING, PREVENTION IS STILL THE BEST CURE

Hearing can be protected from additional damage due to loud noise exposure by following the H.E.A.R. strategy:

Hold Yourself Accountable: It's all about education and action, and like most preventive health measures, you are in the best position to ensure that you practice behaviors that support healthy hearing for yourself and your family.

Evaluate Your Surroundings: In general, if you are standing three feet away from someone and cannot hear what they are saying, the noise

level could be damaging to your hearing. Noise can damage hearing with long-term exposure to sound levels at or above 85 dBA SPL (see Figure 1 below).

Avoid the Noise: The easiest way to avoid noise-induced hearing loss is to avoid the noise! Turn down the volume on your stereo or Mp3 player, and whenever possible move away from the sources of loud noise to diffuse the overall sound intensity and thereby reducing the likelihood of damage to your inner ear.

Remember Protection: If you are not able to avoid excessive noise, muffle it! Earplugs decrease the intensity of the sound traveling to your ear drum and should be worn at all times while working near power tools, firearms, heavy machinery etc.

FIGURE 1: DECIBEL LEVELS BY ACTIVITY/EVENT

| Decibel Level | Activity/Event |
|---------------|--|
| 30 dB | Whisper, quiet library |
| 50-65 dB | Normal conversation |
| 85 dB | Lawnmower, shop tools, truck traffic |
| 95 dB | Movie in a movie theater |
| 100 dB | Farm tractor, cement mixer, snowmobile |
| 110 dB | Video arcade, chainsaw, pneumatic drill/jackhammer |
| 115 dB | Sandblasting, loud rock concert, auto horn |
| 140 dB | Gun muzzle blast, jet engine |

Source: NIDCD,

http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/education/teachers/common_sounds.asp

