Better Hearing this Holiday Season is Easier than Ever

If you have a hearing loss, the next big family gathering can seem daunting—but it doesn’t have to be. If you properly prepare yourself and your loved ones for the next holiday event, you just might find yourself creating the best memories you’ve heard all year.

**Traveling** — Pack Your Accessories—Be sure to pack a better hearing travel kit: extra batteries, a hearing aid cleaning kit, and, if possible, an extra set of hearing aids.

**Once You Get There** — Don’t be Shy... Remind your friends and family that you have a hearing difficulty. They’ll be reminded to slow down, speak up, and be more attentive to your needs.

**Strategic Seating** — If gathering for a meal, ask to be seated at an end of the table so you won’t have multiple conversations on either side of you. Smaller Groups—Is your party dining at multiple tables? If possible, request to sit with a smaller group for easier conversation.

**Turn Down the Volume** — Is there music playing or a television on during your meal? Ask your host to turn down the volume so you can enjoy your time with everyone’s company better.

**Family Activities** — Make a Traditional Family Dish—Share traditions, pass along valuable skills, and have closer conversations preparing nourishing family recipes.

Board Games—Games like Scrabble, checkers, and chess are the perfect vehicle for getting close with one or more people, testing one another’s wits, and having some stress-free holiday fun.

**Schedule a Tune-Up** — Make an appointment to have your hearing aids checked and cleaned before you leave town. At Hearing Professionals, we are constantly striving to better service our patients and give you the most up-to-date information on hearing loss and hearing technology. In our column SOUND ADVICE, you will see our staff showing their support by wearing shirts promoting the “Hear in Pink” campaign sponsored by Oticon, Inc. Oticon will donate a portion of all sales of the special edition pink Oticon Opns® and all Oticon Opn hearing aids to National Breast Cancer Coalition to help find a cure for breast cancer.

At Hearing Professionals, we are constantly striving to better service our patients and give you the most up-to-date information on hearing loss and hearing technology. In our column SOUND ADVICE, we are featuring an article from our audiologist Brittany Nguyen regarding PSAPs or Personal Sound Amplifier Products. Remember that your hearing is an important part of your overall health and we look forward to helping you maintain the lifestyle you desire.

For our patients who enjoy music, concerts, and social events where the volume might be at a high level, don’t miss our article on Page 3 to learn how you can protect yourself from noise induced hearing loss.

**Remember, it’s never too late to hear better and regular check-ups are important for maintaining your hearing health.** For those of you that will be traveling during the winter, make sure to schedule an appointment to have your hearing aids checked and cleaned before you leave town. At Hearing Professionals of Illinois, we are “hear” for you and we look forward to seeing you soon!

Happy Fall! We hope you are doing well and enjoying the change of seasons. Before you know it, the holiday season will be upon us. Did you know that regular hearing screenings are an invaluable tool in identifying problems early and taking steps to prevent further hearing damage before it is too late? Fortunately, nearly all types of hearing loss are treatable by an audiologist. We encourage you to schedule an appointment for a hearing screening with one of our audiologists during the month of October, recognized nationwide as Audiology Awareness Month.

We will also be honoring Breast Cancer Awareness this fall. On Fridays during the month of October, you will see our staff showing their support by wearing shirts promoting the “Hear in Pink” campaign sponsored by Oticon, Inc. Oticon will donate a portion of all sales of the special edition pink Oticon Opns® and all Oticon Opn hearing aids to National Breast Cancer Coalition to help find a cure for breast cancer.

**Have questions? Call us or consult our website www.HearIllinois.com**
OUR STAFF

HAPPY & HEALTHY HEARING

Our staff at Hearing Professionals of Illinois is dedicated to providing you the best hearing healthcare we can, including guidance when navigating through the vast array of hearing technology available. One emerging example of that is personal sound amplifier products, or PSAPs. If that sounds familiar, you may have seen ads for these devices that look like hearing aids, but can be purchased directly online or even at chain stores like Wal-Mart. PSAPs have been featured in publications such as the Wall Street Journal and also recently in the New York Times. Despite the name, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) clearly distinguishes these consumer electronic devices from traditional hearing aids, which are “Intended to compensate for impaired hearing.” The FDA defines PSAPs as devices “intended for non-hearing impaired consumers to amplify sounds in certain environments, such as for hunting or other recreational activities.”

Can people with hearing loss still use PSAPs? The first step in determining that is to have your hearing evaluated by a licensed audiologist who specializes in the evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss.

The audiologist can make recommendations on what hearing solutions are most appropriate for you based on your hearing test results. Using a PSAP without completing a hearing evaluation first can lead to more damage to your hearing, says Eric Mann, M.D., Ph.D, deputy director of FDA’s Division of Ophthalmic, Neurological, And Ear, Nose, and Throat Devices. He notes “It can cause a delay in diagnosis of a potentially treatable condition. And that delay can allow the condition to get worse and lead to other complications.”

Can PSAPs be programmed individually or is it a one-size-fits-all approach? Since PSAPs are essentially unregulated by the FDA at this time, the range of customization and quality varies widely among devices currently on the market. Most are intended to be fit straight out of the box, with a few options for ear tip sizes, and a few environmental presets for different listening situations. Some are also compatible with Smartphone apps where you have a visual display of your presets or customize your own preferences for sound quality. Our audiologists have researched the current devices available and can help you make an informed decision on what hearing solutions are most appropriate for you.

For more information on PSAPs, or to determine if a PSAP is right for you, contact our office at (847) 674-5585 and ask to speak to one of our audiologists. Remember, at Hearing Professionals of Illinois, we are “hear” for you!

PRACTICE UPDATE

Hearing Professionals of Illinois has started a Hearing Healthcare Education Program. This program is particularly helpful for patients who have minimal hearing loss who are not yet experiencing any significant hearing “problems.” It is also beneficial for patients with more significant hearing loss who are candidates for hearing aid use. Think of this next step as preventative medicine for your hearing. You will be empowered to hear at your best as you gain a thorough understanding of the nature of hearing loss, coping strategies to maximize your hearing potential, the best approach to hearing aid use and the importance of maintaining a healthy auditory system. Feel free to call our office for additional information at (847) 674-5585.

Noise-Induced Hearing Loss — The Risks Are Everywhere

According to research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), roughly 15% of all US adults and, even more concerning, 16% of teens, have some hearing loss that can be attributed to loud noises.

Scientists call it noise-induced hearing loss, or NIHL. The bad news is that is what is considered “the norm” — our modern, noisy world — developing a temporary or even permanent case of NIHL is a real possibility, especially if you expose yourself to unsafe levels of noise. Most MP3 players today can produce sounds up to 120 decibels, equivalent to a sound level at a rock concert. At that level, hearing loss can occur after only about an hour and 15 minutes.

The good news, though, is that with a little knowledge and some preventative measures, it is also relatively easy to avoid NIHL. Here’s how the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services, describes noise-induced hearing loss:

“Sounds can be harmful when they are too loud, even for a brief time, or when they are both loud and long-lasting. These sounds can damage sensitive structures in the inner ear and cause noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL).”

NIHL can be immediate or it can take a long time to be noticeable. It can be temporary or permanent, and it can affect one ear or both ears. Even if you can’t tell that you are damaging your hearing, you could have trouble hearing in the future, such as not being able to understand other people when they talk, especially on the phone or in a noisy room.”

What Decibel Level is Considered Safe for Your Ears?

That description sounds pretty scary. It sounds as though the risks of NIHL are everywhere — and in a sense they are. But there is also good news for preventing NIHL. Because sounds are measured in units called decibels (dBs), and because scientists have identified the point at which noise exposure becomes dangerous for the human ear — 85 decibels — we can learn specifically what types of noises to avoid, and give ourselves and our children a much better chance of avoiding NIHL.

For example, to put these risks into a real-world context, the NIDCD’s NIH page lists many common types of noises we encounter, and tells us the typical decibel levels of each. For example:

- A normal conversation is 60 decibels. Perfectly safe.
- The noise of cars and trucks in city traffic is 85 decibels. Not safe. (As if you didn’t already have enough reasons to hate traffic)
- And the noise of many portable music devices set to maximum volume can exceed 105 decibels. Definitely not safe.

Other factors, including the length of time you are exposed to high-decibel noises, as well as your physical distance from the source of these sounds, will contribute to how likely you are to suffer NIHL from them and how quickly the effects might take place. If you are in loud places such as clubs, concerts and sporting events, we recommend that you do your best to position yourself at a distance from the loudspeakers whenever possible. Avoiding excessive use of listening devices or constant noise exposure at unsafe levels will also go a long way in preventing hearing loss.

Clearly, the safest course of action is to be aware of these risks, and to limit your exposure — as well as your kids’ exposure — to the 85+ decibel sounds as much as possible. Another simple way to protect your hearing from some of life’s loud noises — especially from listening to your music at a dangerously high volume is with noise-limiting headphones or by purchasing noise protection plugs. At Hearing Professionals of Illinois, we can help you with your noise protection needs. We offer universal fit ear protection plugs as well as custom fit musician’s plugs and hunter’s plugs.

The bottom line...Do everything you can to protect your hearing because you never know how valuable your hearing is until you start to lose it.