

Hearing Loss Doesn't Just Affect Hearing . . .

The Personal Impact of Untreated Hearing Loss

One of the most commonly unaddressed health conditions in America today, hearing loss affects more than 31.5 million Americans—most of whom are below retirement age.

Hearing loss can strike at any time and at any age. And when left unaddressed, hearing loss can affect virtually every aspect of an individual's life. Numerous studies, in fact, have linked untreated hearing loss to a wide range of physical and emotional conditions, including irritability, negativism, anger, fatigue, tension, stress, depression, avoidance or withdrawal from social situations, social rejection and loneliness, reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety, impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks, reduced job performance and earning power, and diminished psychological and overall health.

Three in ten people over age 60 have hearing loss. And among Americans ages 41 to 59, about 15 percent already have hearing problems—that's one in six baby boomers. Younger still, 7.4 percent—or one in 14—Generation Xers, ages 29 to 40, suffer from hearing loss. What's more, at least 1.4 million children, 18 or younger, have hearing problems. And it's estimated that 3 in 1,000 infants are born with serious to profound hearing loss.

Despite the numbers and the far-reaching impact hearing loss has on so many aspects of an individual's life, many people who are aware that their hearing has deteriorated are reluctant to seek help. Unfortunately, too many wait years, even decades, before getting treatment, becoming more and more disconnected as time goes by.

But the fact is that with modern advances in technology, there are solutions for many. In fact, 90 to 95 percent of people with hearing loss *can* be helped with hearing aids—and their quality of life significantly improved.

Common Signs and Symptoms

The signs of hearing loss can be subtle and emerge slowly, or they can be significant and come on suddenly. Either way, there are common indications.

Socially, individuals with hearing loss may:

- require frequent repetition;

- have difficulty following conversations involving more than two people;
- think that other people sound muffled or like they're mumbling;
- have difficulty hearing in noisy situations, like conferences, restaurants, malls, or crowded meeting rooms;
- have trouble hearing children and women;
- keep the TV or radio turned up to a high volume;
- answer or respond inappropriately in conversations;
- have ringing in their ears; and/or
- read lips or more intently watch people's faces when in conversation.

Emotionally, individuals with hearing loss may:

- feel stressed from straining to hear what others are saying;
- feel annoyed at others because they can't hear or understand them;
- feel embarrassed to meet new people or from misunderstanding what others are saying;
- feel nervous about trying to hear and understand; and/or
- withdraw from social situations that they once enjoyed.

Medically, individuals with hearing loss may:

- have a family history of hearing loss;
- take medications that can harm the hearing system (ototoxic drugs);
- have diabetes, heart, circulation or thyroid problems; and/or
- have been exposed to very loud sounds over a long period or single exposure to explosive noise.

Seeking Help

Hearing aids hold such great potential to positively change so many lives. Yet only one in five people who could benefit from hearing devices currently wear them. The Better Hearing Institute encourages anyone with a mild, moderate, or severe hearing loss to seek assistance from a hearing healthcare professional and to explore the options for improving their hearing—and their lives. The most comprehensive list of local hearing healthcare professionals can be found in local yellow pages under "audiologist," "audiology," "hearing aids," or "Physicians - Ear Nose Throat (Otolaryngology)."

Founded in 1973, the Better Hearing Institute is a not-for-profit educational organization whose mission is to educate the public about hearing loss, its treatment and prevention. To receive a free copy of BHI's 28 page booklet "Your Guide to Better Hearing," visit its website at www.betterhearing.org or call the Better Hearing Institute hotline at 1-800-EAR-WELL.