

H.E.A.R.S. AUDIOLOGY, P.C.

Hearing Education, Assessment and Related Services

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STOP PRETENDING, START HEARING

By Kathleen Page, M.A., F.A.A.A., and Lynda Kunis, M.A.

Many of us take our good hearing for granted. But the fact is, good hearing is a precious commodity, and our ears deserve a little respect. We need to hear well to enjoy all the nuances of a symphonic masterpiece, or to enjoy a Broadway stage production. We need to hear well in order to communicate, to learn, and to socialize. And we need to hear well to stay safe.

It has been estimated that 28 million Americans suffer from some form of hearing impairment. Another 78 million Rock-n-Roll generation Baby Boomers are fast approaching "senior" status and could suffer from even greater incidences of hearing loss. In fact, many Baby Boomers have already experienced symptoms of hearing loss at a relatively early age. Because hearing loss occurs very gradually, and not overnight, people find ways to compensate without even knowing it. They often change their lifestyle to accommodate the hearing loss, but don't realize they are withdrawing from routine activities they enjoyed.

According to the National Council on the Aging, untreated hearing loss can negatively impact your job performance, social life, relationships with friends and family, and ultimately your physical well-being. Additionally, there is a risk of auditory deprivation, which refers to a person's lack of adequate hearing stimulation and can cause the brain to gradually lose some of its information processing ability. Auditory deprivation most often occurs when a hearing loss goes untreated over a long period of time. Depending on your hearing loss, the effects of auditory deprivation can be reduced in many cases by wearing hearing aids. Even those with long-standing untreated hearing impairment can notice considerable benefit with hearing aid use; however, the earlier you consider wearing hearing aids, the better your chances are of minimizing this risk.

The best course of action is to consult with an audiologist (a professional specializing in hearing health care) who can perform a complete assessment of your hearing and discuss options that best fit your needs. If a hearing aid is recommended, there are many types and sizes to fit all budgets. Today's digital hearing aid technology is vastly more sophisticated than that of hearing instruments in years past. With features to reduce background noise and improve clarity of speech, digital hearing aids provide a crisp, clear, and more natural sound.

Hearing loss is a growing medical condition that needs your attention. It is important to discuss with your physician the symptoms of your hearing loss and its impact on your lifestyle. Answer the following questions to help you decide if a hearing evaluation is needed. Be honest with yourself, this is about *your hearing* . . .

1. Do you have a problem hearing over the telephone?
2. Do you avoid social activities because you cannot hear well and fear you will reply improperly?
3. Do others complain that you turn the TV volume up too high or do you have trouble understanding the dialogue on the TV?
4. Do you have to strain to understand conversation?
5. Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?
6. Do you have trouble hearing in a noisy background, such as a crowded room or restaurant?
7. Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?
8. Do you get confused about the direction sounds come from?
9. Do many people you talk to seem to mumble or not speak clearly?
10. Do you have trouble understanding the speech of women and children?
11. Do people get annoyed because you misunderstand what they say?
12. Do family members and friends tell you they think you may have a hearing loss?

If you answered "Yes" to 3 or more questions, you should speak to an audiologist about scheduling a comprehensive hearing evaluation and share the test results with your physician. (The preceding questions were adapted from AAO-HNS, American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery, and NIDCD, National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders.)

To find out more about hearing loss and treatment options for you or someone you know, or to schedule a comprehensive audiological evaluation, contact H.E.A.R.S. Audiology at (631) 360-HEAR (4327). Or, if you prefer, call and register to receive a free hearing screening, hearing aid demonstration, and consultation with one of our audiologists at our next Open House Event. H.E.A.R.S. Audiology, P.C., located in Smithtown, provides audiology and speech/language services to adult and pediatric populations. Services include full evaluations, auditory processing assessments, hearing aid services, on-site preschool screenings, and therapy/rehab. H.E.A.R.S. Audiology, P.C. was voted "Best of Long Island 2007".