

Hearing HealthCare News®

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Summer

Why Does Hearing Loss Go Undetected?

Hearing loss often goes unnoticed and the person with the hearing problem is usually the last one to become aware of it. Some people call this “denial,” but that’s not really fair.

There are good reasons why hearing loss goes undetected, at least by the person with the loss. The unfortunate result is that many people put off getting help for several years.

Understanding the characteristics of hearing loss that occurs in adults may explain why hearing loss can “sneak up” on someone, even when their family and friends are well aware of the problem.

Gradual. A loss of hearing can develop so slowly that you’re not aware of any change from year to year. A loss might occur at the rate of one decibel a year. That’s a daily change of about .001 percent of your hearing. No wonder it’s not noticed! But 10 or 20 years of this gradual loss can lead to a very significant—yet unnoticed—hearing problem.

Partial. You can develop a hearing loss for sounds in the range of speech clarity, but still have normal hearing sensitivity for background noises and for the loudness of speech. That’s why someone with early onset hearing loss may say, “I can hear people talking . . . I just can’t understand them.”

Loud sounds are still loud. In most cases, the hearing loss is for soft sounds, not for loud sounds. Since loud sounds seem to be as loud as ever—how can there be a hearing loss?

Painless. Although *tinnitus* (a ringing or buzzing sound in the ear) may accompany hearing loss, 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 an audiologic evaluation can determine whether hearing loss is present.

If you know someone who may have an undetected hearing loss, the first step is not to get hearing aids, but simply to have a professional hearing test. And we’ve never had anyone complain if the results indicate normal hearing!

Hearing Aids: More Than Just Better Hearing

Hearing aids. Those words are pretty clear. Hearing aids are devices that “aid your hearing.” Hearing aids allow you to hear better and with less effort.

But we now know that hearing aids do a lot more than help you hear better. Some of these benefits are not obvious, but they are important nevertheless.

In recent years, research has demonstrated that hearing aids help to reduce depression, increase social activity, improve an individual’s sense of well-being, improve family relations, and significantly decrease the negative mental

effects of untreated hearing loss.

Two recent surveys of more than 120,000 people in Europe and the United States support these findings and provide additional insights. For example, today about 80% of hearing aid users report being satisfied with their hearing aids—and 90% are satisfied with their hearing care provider. These numbers indicate significant gains from years past.



People with hearing loss who use hearing aids tend to be more socially active and more mentally alert.

Family Help for a Family Issue

A recent article in the *Washington Post* suggested a solution to an age-old problem.

Although hearing loss can occur at any age, it becomes more common as we get older. In fact, the hearing of a typical 40-year old is already slightly poorer than the hearing of a typical 18-year old.

According to the *Washington Post* article, many family members talk louder or tolerate loud television because their parent or grandparent refuses to accept that he or she has a hearing loss. But that approach only allows the person to mistakenly believe there *is* no problem. Denial is probably the greatest obstacle to good hearing health care.

A recent survey by AARP and the American Speech Language Association found that half of adults with hearing loss said family gatherings were difficult. Seventy-five per cent said they felt left out because of hearing issues.

A family solution

The survey also found a potential solution for the problem of denial. While only about 25% of respondents said they would raise the issue of hearing themselves, more than half said they would seek help if a family member—and especially a grandchild—asked them to do so. We also know that the most important factor for successful hearing aid use is the support of family and friends.

The solution? Rather than speaking louder, the family member who encourages a spouse or parent or grandparent to seek professional help may be taking the most effective step toward better hearing.

Quality of life

More than 85% of hearing aid users both in Europe and the United States reported their hearing aids *occasionally* or *regularly* improve their quality of life. About 50% said that their improved hearing has made relationships better at home and at work. More than 90% said their hearing aids are very useful at their workplace.

About 40% of hearing aid users said they feel “better” or “a lot better” about their sense of safety and their feelings of independence.

The most satisfied hearing aid users are those from France, Switzerland and the United States.

An interesting difference was found between European and American habits: Europeans reported using their hearing aids about 8^{1/2} hours a day, while Americans wear their aids 11^{1/2} hours a day. However, this may simply reflect how the question was asked.

Whatever the differences across countries and health care systems, it’s clear that hearing aids do more than provide better hearing. Those people who get help for their hearing generally have a better quality of life, better relationships at home and at work, less anxiety and depression and a healthier mental status. Yes, hearing aids help your hearing. . . plus a lot more.