

Hearing Loss in Today's Noisy World

Already, more than 34 million people—roughly 11 percent of the U.S. population—suffer from hearing loss due to exposure to noise, aging, genetics, and use of ototoxic drugs. What's more, it is estimated that 30 million Americans are exposed to dangerous noise levels each day. This excessive noise doesn't stop at robbing people of their hearing. The hearing loss itself, in turn, negatively affects cognitive functioning and progressively erodes quality of life.

When individuals expend so much energy on hearing accurately, their ability to remember spoken language suffers as a result. And their cognitive function suffers. Recent studies even suggest that hearing loss may be a risk factor for dementia.

Untreated hearing loss isn't just linked to impaired memory and the impaired ability to learn new tasks, however. Relationships suffer as well. And unaddressed hearing loss can lead to loneliness and isolation. Numerous studies show that when left unaddressed, hearing loss is linked to reduced alertness, increased risk of personal safety, irritability, negativism, anger, fatigue, tension, stress, depression, and diminished psychological and overall health. Income is even affected.

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. Symptoms of hearing loss include not being able to hear well in a crowded room or restaurant; having trouble hearing children and women; keeping the television or radio turned up to a high volume; needing to ask friends to repeat what they're saying; or experiencing ringing in the ears.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of those with hearing loss could benefit from hearing aids, hearing loss remains one of the most commonly unaddressed health conditions in America today. In fact, only 40 percent of Americans with moderate to severe hearing loss and 9 percent of those with mild hearing loss wear hearing aids. What's more, fewer than 15 percent of those who received a physical exam in the last year said they received a hearing screening by their physician or nurse during that exam.

Advances in digital technology have dramatically improved hearing aids in recent years, making them smaller with better sound quality. Designs are modern, sleek, and discreet. Clarity, greater directionality, better speech audibility in a variety of environments, better cell phone compatibility, less whistling and feedback than hearing aids of the past, and greater ruggedness for active lifestyles are common features.

The Better Hearing Institute urges people, young and old, to take the online hearing check, [Across America Hearing Check Challenge](#). By visiting www.hearingcheck.org and walking through a 15-question self-screener, anyone can quickly assess if they may have a hearing loss and need a more comprehensive hearing evaluation by a hearing professional.

For more information on why healthy hearing is an important part of overall health and quality of life, visit www.betterhearing.org.