

# HEARING, HEALTH, & COMMUNICATION



**HASA**  
**HEARING & SPEECH SERVICES**

## CONTACT US

**The Hearing and Speech Agency**  
5900 Metro Drive | Baltimore, MD 21215  
(410) 318-6780 | [hasa@hasa.org](mailto:hasa@hasa.org)

## HEARING LOSS IN THE WORKPLACE

Every year approximately 22 million U.S. workers are exposed to hazardous noise levels at work, and about 24% of the hearing difficulty among U.S. workers is caused by occupational exposures (including chemical exposure). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has a Recommended Exposure Limit of 85 decibels for occupational noise. Using hearing protection when hazardous noise levels cannot be adequately reduced is one of the best ways to protect your hearing in the workplace.

## NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS

There are microscopic hair cells found inside the ear that respond to different vibrations and send an electrical signal to the auditory nerve, which translates those vibrations into sound in the brain. Different groups of these cells are responsible for processing different frequencies. Louder sounds, or more intense vibrations, can damage or break these hair cells. If enough are damaged, this contributes to Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL). NIHL is non-reversible, so remember to protect your hearing when in high-volume areas at work or at home.

## HEARING LOSS AND THE ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal laws have provisions that cover the workplace, including Title 1, which requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with qualifying conditions such as hearing loss. It is important for organizations and their employees to be informed about their rights under the ADA. Please visit [www.hasa.org](http://www.hasa.org) for more information.

## FACTS ABOUT HEARING LOSS IN ADULTS

- One in every ten (28 million) Americans has hearing loss. As baby boomers reach retirement age starting in 2010, this number is expected to rapidly climb and nearly double by the year 2030.
- Up to 1 in 3 people over age 65 has hearing loss. Most hearing loss develops over 25 - 30 years.
- Among seniors, hearing loss is the third most prevalent, but treatable condition after arthritis and hypertension.
- While the vast majority of Americans (95%) with hearing loss could be successfully treated with hearing aids, only 25% (6.35 million individuals) currently use them. Only 5% of hearing loss in adults can be improved through medical or surgical treatment.

## THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF HEARING LOSS

Medical providers are increasingly encouraging patients to attend to their hearing loss. More and more research conducted into hearing loss shows greater implications for senior patients than just trouble hearing. Hearing loss is now being associated with other potentially more serious health problems:

- **DIABETES:** Researchers have proven a strong correlation between hearing loss in older patients and an increased risk in contracting Type 2 diabetes. In a recent study, researchers discovered that diabetics are 2.15 times more likely to have hearing loss than people without diabetes.
- **RISK OF FALLING:** In a recent study review, researchers found that people between the ages of 40 and 69 with hearing loss at 25 decibels were nearly three times more likely to have a history of falling. For every 10 decibels greater, that risk increased 1.4 times.
- **COGNITIVE DECLINE:** Hearing loss, if left untreated, contributes to an increased risk for cognitive decline. The results of a recent study revealed that older patients with hearing loss had greater shrinkage of brain tissue and atrophy in parts of the brain that play key roles in memory and sensory integration.

**COMMUNICATION  
MATTERS**