

Untreated hearing loss causes health problems

Many people with hearing loss do not want to acknowledge that they have a problem, are embarrassed by what they see as a weakness, or believe they can get “by” without help. As a result, many wait years before seeking help and treatment. Hearing loss can also occur so gradually that many people do not realize what they are missing. However, research has demonstrated considerable negative social, psychological, cognitive, and health effects from untreated hearing loss.

Untreated hearing loss has been linked to:

- Reduced job performance and earning power.
- Irritability, negativism, and anger.
- Fatigue, tension, stress, and 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.
- Diminished psychological and overall health.

Hearing loss does not just occur in seniors – it can strike at any age, even in childhood. In a recent survey in the United States by the Better Hearing Institute 31 million Americans admitted to having hearing loss, of whom only 37 per cent were at retirement age. The majority were either school age or in the workforce.

Yet, only 23 per cent of Americans with hearing loss are being helped with hearing instruments (which are the necessary treatment for 90 to 95 per cent of people with hearing loss).

Many working adults with hearing loss delay seeking treatment due to fear of

stigmatization on the job. However, most jobs require verbal communication in order to effectively engage in commerce, deal with the public, and assure safety.

A study by the Better Hearing Institute found that those with untreated hearing loss are expected to suffer losses in compensation due to underemployment, lost wages, lost promotions, and lost opportunities. They may make mistakes on the job, experience higher rates of unemployment, and in general may experience an overall reduction in quality of life (i.e. anxiety, depression, social isolation, social paranoia, medical health, emotional stability, and reduced cognitive functioning) which may negatively affect job performance.

The Better Hearing Institute study found that the estimated lost earnings due to untreated hearing loss is \$122 billion while the cost to society in terms of unrealized tax potential is \$18 billion. The more severe one’s hearing loss, the more negative its impact was upon household income.

For every 10 per cent increase in hearing loss, there was a decrease of approximately \$1,000 in income. On the other hand, those who sought treatment and wore hearing devices did not show as dramatic a loss in income (as compared to those with untreated hearing loss). This is a frightening statistic when one considers that 77 per cent of those with hearing loss do not seek treatment!

So what can you do? It is important to be proactive in identifying the signs of hearing loss and if you suspect you or someone you know has hearing loss, have your hearing checked right away by an audiologist.

Audiologists are healthcare professionals with a masters level or doctorate level education and clinical training in balance

and hearing systems and their disorders. They assess hearing and balance, and provide treatment and consultation to individuals of all ages.

You should suspect a hearing loss if you:

- Have been exposed to high levels of noise such as tractors, machinery, firearms, power tools or loud music.
- Feel growing nervous tension, irritability, or fatigue from the effort to hear.
- Find yourself withdrawing from social situations you once enjoyed because of difficulty hearing.
- Feel as though “everybody mumbles” or “people don’t speak clearly.”
- Find yourself straining to understand conversations.
- Have difficulty following conversations involving more than 2 people.
- Have difficulty hearing in noisy situations, like conferences, restaurants, malls, or meetings.
- Have trouble hearing women and children (high-pitched voices).
- Frequently misunderstand or need to have things repeated.
- Find yourself watching people’s faces when listening.
- Increase the television, radio, or stereo volume to a point where others complain of the loudness.
- Have a family history of hearing loss.
- Have diabetes, heart, thyroid, or circulation problems.
- Have been exposed to ototoxic drugs or medications
- Have reoccurring ear infections, constant ringing in the ears, or dizziness.

You do not want to miss out on living your life to your full potential!

Information provided by Professional Audiology Clinic.

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