

# Hearing HealthCare News<sup>®</sup>

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Fall 2014

## An Invisible Problem

Hearing loss is one of the most common health problems in this country (along with arthritis and hypertension).

But hearing loss may be the most undetected and untreated problem in adults, and the person with the hearing problem is often the last one to become aware of it. As a result, many people put off getting help for several years, even when family, friends and co-workers are aware of the hearing difficulties.

Understanding four common characteristics of hearing loss may explain why it often goes undetected.

### Four Characteristics

**Gradual.** Hearing loss can develop so slowly that you're not aware of any change from year to year. A loss of one decibel of hearing each year is not noticeable, but 10 or 20 years of gradual loss can lead to a very significant—but unnoticed—hearing problem.

**Partial.** You can develop a hearing loss for sounds in the speech clarity range, but still have normal hearing sensitivity for many of the sounds around you. That's why someone with early onset hearing loss may say, "I can hear people talking... I just can't understand them."

**Painless.** Although *tinnitus* (a ringing or buzzing sound in the ear) may accompany hearing loss, usually 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 a hearing loss is present.

Because of these characteristics, it's understandable that someone in the early stages of early loss often believes there is no problem, despite what family and friends say. Unfortunately, the person may then put off getting help for several years—and almost always says, "I should have done this years ago."

If you think you know someone who has an undetected hearing loss, please ask him or her to read this article. The first step is not to get hearing aids, but simply to have a hearing test. We've never heard anyone complain if the results indicate normal hearing!

## The Three Most Challenging Places...

Can you guess the places where people often complain about have difficulty hearing and understanding?

1. *Movies*
2. *Television*
3. *Noisy Restaurants*
4. *All of the above*

The answer is (4), all of the above. And these hearing complaints are from people with normal hearing!

Two of the settings have something in common: **movie films** and **television** broadcasts use various recording, processing, transmitting and amplifying techniques that can make understanding more difficult for anyone.

Movie theaters use *loudness expansion* to make loud sounds louder than normal (especially during coming attractions). This is the opposite of what people with hearing loss need. Most people with hearing loss are *more* sensitive to loud sounds than people with normal hearing. (We can't explain *why* movie theaters play the soundtrack so loud, since almost everyone complains about it.)

In addition, film directors often use

### Hearing Aid Success in Adults

The results of several studies suggest that the most important factor contributing to successful hearing aid use is the positive support of family and friends. Successful hearing aid users commonly report, "The people around me think it was wise to get hearing aids," and "The people around me think I hear better with my hearing aids."

Two other important factors leading to successful hearing aid use are the person's **attitude** and **ease of handling**. Individuals who have a positive attitude about hearing aids and are comfortable handling them tend to be successful users. In other words, a positive attitude both *before* and *after* obtaining hearing aids contributes to success.

Not surprisingly, individuals with greater hearing difficulties tend to feel they are more successful with their

(continued on other side)

several microphones to record speech from several people and locations at the same time. They also like to include background noise to make the scene more realistic. Add some background music and you've created a very difficult listening situation. If you want to watch a movie that's easy to understand, try one made in the 1940s!

### What about television?

Most television sets have relatively small speakers. The quality and clarity of the recorded, processed, transmitted and amplified speech is *usually* good enough for people with normal hearing. But it's not the same quality as live, face-to-face speech, and it's often not good enough for people with hearing loss. In addition, speech clarity and loudness will vary from channel to channel, from program to program, and from speaker to speaker. We also often hear complaints about programs such as *Downton Abbey* and *Elementary*, with those challenging English accents!

What about televisions sets with large speakers, surround sound systems, or even home theatres? These systems don't necessarily make speech easier to understand. In fact, surround sound

*If you want to watch a movie that's easy to understand, try one made in the 1940s!*

systems can introduce a slight reverberation or echo to the sound, making it more realistic, more three-dimensional—and more difficult to understand. If you're having difficulty understanding a television program, consider turning off the surround sound effect.

In other words, the clarity of speech that has been recorded, processed, and transmitted through cable or over the air, is simply not as good as when you hear it face-to-face. For people with hearing loss, the difference is enough to make understanding speech in movies or on television more difficult.

And those noisy restaurants? That's a topic for another newsletter.

*Note: Almost all television sets have captioning already built-in. The written text can be turned on using the remote control.*



## Celebrity Hearing Challenges

Many celebrities have talked about dealing with the challenges of tinnitus or hearing loss, and how tinnitus treatment or hearing aids have helped them. Golfer *Arnie Palmer*, race car drivers *Al and Bobby Unser*, Olympic runner *Jim Ryun* and Miss America 1995 *Heather Whitestone*, all helped to increase public awareness.

Former president *Ronald Reagan* probably brought the greatest attention to the problems of hearing loss. When President Reagan began using hearing aids, the media attention motivated many people to get help.

Former president *Bill Clinton* started using hearing aids in 1997 while in office after audiologists at the National Naval Medical Center evaluated his hearing. He attributed some of his hearing loss to playing in rock bands when he was young.

Entertainment figures who have talked about their hearing loss include actors *Rob Lowe*, *Morgan Freeman* and *Richard Thomas*, and actresses *Marlee Matlin* and *Halle Berry*. Other well-known figures include musicians *Les Paul*, *Peter Townsend* (the *Who*), *Brian Love* (*Beach Boys*), inventor *Thomas Edison* and, of course, *Beethoven*.

Many people in the entertainment world also deal with *tinnitus*—hearing hissing, ringing or other sounds that are not actually present. *Steve Martin*, *Bob Dylan*, *Paul Simon* and both *William Shatner* and *Leonard Nimoy*, the captain and his first officer on *Star Trek*, suffer from tinnitus.

Hearing loss and tinnitus are so common in the rock music world that a foundation was created to help. *Hearing Education and Awareness for Rockers—H.E.A.R.—*

provides information and suggestions to help minimize ear damage that can be caused by exposure to loud sounds, including music. You can learn more at [www.hearnet.com](http://www.hearnet.com).

### Hearing Aid Success *(from other side)*

hearing aids. However, this is only the third most important factor.

#### Clinical implications

The results from several studies suggest that:

- Family members should be involved in the hearing rehabilitation process.
- The process should include an exploration of the effects of the hearing loss on the individual and his or her family.
- Instruction and demonstration of the handling of the hearing aids contributes to successful use.



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## Hearing Care

We hope you're enjoying our newsletter and finding the information useful.

As you know, we call our newsletter *Hearing HealthCare News*. It's not *Hearing HealthCure News*. That's because hearing loss is seldom cured. Yes, losses caused by impacted ear wax and ear infection can be treated and cured. But most cases of hearing loss, especially in adults, affect the inner ear. Rarely can these be treated medically.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of help available. Our job is to provide hearing *care* for you. Our goal is to help you *hear as well as possible*, including in challenging places such as noisy restaurants and large groups of people. We also believe it's important for you and your family to understand the nature of hearing loss, the different causes, and the different kinds of help available to you.

The care we can provide is better than ever—and our newsletter is part of that care.

Sincerely,

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