

# Age-Related Hearing Loss

**1 in 3 people over age 60 have hearing loss**

**1 in 2 people over age 85 have hearing loss**

Hearing loss related to age is called presbycusis and it is a combination of changes to

- The structures of the inner ear.
- Blood flow to the inner ear
- The hearing nerve
- How the brain processes speech and sounds

Presbycusis typically is a high-pitched gradual hearing loss that can be noticed by the subtle changes in hearing over time. Common symptoms of presbycusis include having difficulty hearing female voices, children's voices, and background noises, as well as the loss of speech clarity.

Hearing loss due to aging can be worsened by other factors such as diabetes, poor circulation, noise exposure, and certain medications:

- 30–35 percent of adults between the ages of 65 and 75 years suffer from hearing loss.
- 40–50 percent of adults 75 and older suffer from hearing loss.

People with untreated hearing loss (those with hearing loss who do not wear hearing aids) experience a decreased quality of life. Untreated hearing loss can lead to sadness, depression, anxiety, paranoia, and poor social relationships.

One way of treating age-related hearing loss is with hearing aids. Modern hearing aids are digital microcomputers that can automatically adjust to sound thousands of times per second, making speech comfortable and natural sounding.

## Hearing Aid Facts

- Hearing aids can improve communication with family, friends, and co-workers, which can help maintain a better quality of life.
- Hearing aid technology is constantly evolving, such as the use of directional microphones, to help you better understand speech in noisy environments.
- Wearing hearing aids can improve your overall hearing; however, hearing aids do not function like natural ears do; hearing loss is irreversible.
  - Hearing aids come in a variety of options at different price points, the cost of a hearing aid depends on the technology used.
  - Medicare covers hearing testing with a physician's referral, but Medicare does not cover the cost of hearing aids.
  - Medicaid, some private insurance carriers, and some charitable organizations may help cover the cost of hearing aids.
  - Most audiologists have financing or payment plans available to help with the costs of hearing aids
- Hearing aids come in several styles that include completely in-the-canal, in-the-canal, in-the-ear, and behind-the-ear.
  - Behind-the-ear hearing aids are smaller than in years past and come in a variety of styles, colors, and shapes.

## **Common Signs of Hearing Loss**

- Asking people to repeat what they say.
- Feeling like others are always mumbling or not speaking clearly.
- Difficulty hearing and understanding speech in noisy environments.
- Missing words or phrases on the telephone.
- Turning the volume up on the television or radio louder than normal.

## **Prevention**

Although hearing loss with age is inevitable, there are some steps you can take to prevent your hearing loss from getting worse. Day to day, you should consider avoiding loud sounds, using ear protection when around loud sounds, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Research has shown that the "use it or lose it" principle applies to our ears. Untreated hearing loss can lead to deteriorated understanding of speech over time. Treating hearing loss early rather than later or putting it off is highly recommended.

*Information was obtained from the American Academy of Audiology website at [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org).*