

Untreated Hearing Loss can be Scary!

What?

Say that again!

Don't mumble!

Huh?

What did you say?

Speak up a bit!

Do we find ourselves saying these phrases? We may have hearing loss. Frustrating for us? Sure, it is. Losing hearing is scary.

However, untreated hearing loss affects more than just us. It affects our family, friends, co-workers – everyone around us. They are also frustrated trying to keep up with our hearing needs. They repeat themselves frequently, talk more clearly, use more gestures to ensure we understand, translate what others say, answer the phone, tell us when the doorbell rings, when the smoke detector goes off, wake us in the morning because we don't hear the alarm clock.

* There are approximately 48 million Americans with some level of hearing loss (National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders - NIDCD)

* In Sarasota/Manatee counties, there are 135,000 people living with hearing loss

* 60% of people with hearing loss are either in the workforce or in an educational setting

*At age 65, one of three people has hearing loss

*14% seek treatment

*Less than 0.1% get support

* Only 20% of individuals with hearing loss who might benefit from treatment actually seek help. Unfortunately, many people wait approximately 7 years before getting treatment

Why are people so reluctant to seek help?

- Vanity – we don't want to look old
- Denial – we can hear just fine
- Embarrassment – we don't want to appear feeble and weak
- Stigma attached to hearing loss
- Unaware we have a problem – usually family and friends are the first to notice hearing loss

“Few chronic illnesses are as insidious and difficult to detect yet striking in their effects on our psychological and social well-being as the uncorrected loss of hearing”, says Dr. Max Chartrand, professor of Behavioral Medicine at North Central University in Prescott Valley, Arizona.

According to the Better Hearing Institute, several studies have linked untreated hearing loss to:

- * 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
- * reduced job performance and earning power
- * diminished psychological and overall health

According to Gagne, Southall and Jennings(2011), “In order to live well with hearing loss, one must *recognize* and *accept* hearing loss. Specifically, many people must overcome the misplaced shame and poor self-esteem that they may experience”.

Fortunately, hearing loss is treatable. According to the Better Hearing Institute 'approximately 95% of Americans with hearing loss can be treated with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. Hearing aids/cochlear implants help process incoming sounds making it easier for your brain to understand them. Other benefits of hearing aids/cochlear implants include reduced mental fatigue, decreased feelings of social isolation and depression, improved ability to do several things at once, improved memory, attention and focus, as well as improved communication skills'.

When hearing aids and cochlear implants are not quite enough, Assistive Listening Devices can fill in the gaps.

- Alarm clock, doorbell ringer, telephone, smoke alarm with flashing light or strobe light
- Loops electromagnetically enhance your listening pleasure in theaters, public buildings. Turn on the telecoil (t-coil) on your hearing aid or cochlear implant and the sound will go directly to your ears
- Closed Captioning in movie theaters – all Regal cinemas have SONY glasses. Most AMC theaters have Captiview. Closed captioning prints the spoken text so you can read it. It helps fill in the words we missed
- CART – communication access real time

Hellen Keller was an American political activist and writer. She wrote four books including *The Miracle Worker*. She became blind and deaf at 19 months due to scarlet fever. She said that blindness takes you away from things. Deafness takes you away from people. In this day and age of technology, there is no need to allow deafness to take you away from people.

Benefits of Early Detection and Treatment of Hearing Loss

1. Keeps the brain active – people living with untreated hearing loss may not be aware that the brain becomes accustomed to not

hearing certain sounds and will 'forget' how to process speech. In 2010, The Better Hearing Institute reported that studies have shown that the use of hearing aids can help Alzheimer's patients. Because there is a strong link between hearing loss and cognitive function, they Better Hearing Institute in partnership with Alzheimer's Association, is encouraging hearing health professionals to raise awareness of Alzheimer's, its early warning signs and the related implications of unaddressed hearing loss. The longer one waits to get treatment, the more overwhelmed the brain will be when first using a hearing aid.

A separate study at Johns Hopkins found that cognitive diminishment was 41% greater in seniors with hearing loss. The study identified a link between hearing loss and the risk of developing dementia. Our brains shrink with age. The brains of people with hearing loss shrink more than those with no hearing loss.

2. Improves quality of life, emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, social activities and earning power
3. Reduces feelings of anger, frustration, depression, paranoia, anxiety
4. Lives more safely, securely and independently

Remember Gagne, Southall and Jennings(2011), "In order to live well with hearing loss, one must *recognize* and *accept* hearing loss".

Take that first step toward staying in the world of communication, improving your quality of life - treat yourself to a hearing test.

Sources:

www.betterhearing.org/hearingpedia/consequences-hearing-loss

www.audiologyawareness.com/hearinginfo_untreated.asp

www.asha.org/Aud/Aarticles/Untreated-Hearing-Loss-in-Adults

www.sflhealthandwellness.com/is-hearing-loss-scaring-you/

www.beltonene.com/left-untreated.html

www.Starkey.com Beth McCormick

You do not need to face hearing loss alone. Contact the local chapter of Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) where you will find support, education and advocacy from the peer mentors and members. For more information, contact info@hlas.org or call 941-320-8825.

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