



## **NEWS FROM AVA HEARING CENTER**

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### OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

Over 31 million Americans have been diagnosed with hearing loss. Millions more probably suffer in silence. Because a hearing impaired person is usually the last person to recognize their hearing loss, many people never have their hearing tested. Spouses, friends and family are often accused of mumbling or talking under their breath. Hearing loss sufferers may unconsciously begin to exclude themselves from social activities because they don't feel a part of the activity. They may feel nervous or aggravated in group situations because they only hear bits and pieces of conversation. Trying to compensate for a hearing loss can be exhausting yet the sufferer may not even recognize that hearing loss is at the root of the frustration.

Though hearing loss affects all age groups, there is a negative stigma associated with the disorder. To many people, hearing loss is just another sign of getting older. Other health issues associated with aging (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, arthritis, changes in vision) are readily investigated and treated by physicians. The Better Hearing Institute reported that only 13% of primary physicians refer for hearing testing though it is the #2 health complaint in America (headache #1). In a quiet exam room a physician may not recognize the presence of a hearing loss. Because most hearing loss comes on gradually, a person may not be aware that their hearing has changed. An annual hearing evaluation by an audiologist is recommended for adults over the age of 50, sooner if there is a history of noise exposure, family history of hearing loss, use of ototoxic medication, trauma, tinnitus, dizziness or if a change in hearing is noticed by the patient.

Hearing loss affects communication in many ways but primarily by decreasing the loudness of the speech signal and the clarity of the words and message. According to Hull (1997) hearing loss may be associated with "feelings of embarrassment, frustration, anger, defeat and ultimate withdrawal from situations that require communication is very real among older persons who are hearing impaired". Hearing loss in the presence of other limitations such as mobility, visual and cognitive changes, especially in the elderly, may result in depression and self-isolation. The effects of hearing loss vary from person to person and the adjustment to hearing loss is a unique experience. But numerous research studies have demonstrated the considerable negative social, psychological, cognitive and health effects of untreated hearing loss. These effects have far-reaching implications that go well beyond hearing alone.

Many people are aware that their hearing has deteriorated but are reluctant to seek help. They may choose to ignore their hearing loss because they don't want to wear a hearing aid. They may be embarrassed by what they see as a weakness, or believe that they can "get by" without using a hearing aid. And, unfortunately, too many people wait years, even decades, before getting treatment.

So how do you talk with a loved one about their hearing loss? Keep in mind that the person with hearing loss may be truly unaware of their hearing loss. Dr. David Myers wrote in his book *A Quiet World, Living with Hearing Loss*, "If you don't hear something, you don't know you've missed it. The

spouse who says something and gets no response records a “miss”. The understandable failure to notice hearing “misses” helps explain the “denial” often attributed to the hearing impaired.”

By saying "I don't think you heard me, let me say it again" you bring the “miss” to the attention of the listener. Another technique to demonstrate hearing loss is to ask the listener to repeat what they believe they heard. This not only allows the hearing impaired person an opportunity to identify their hearing loss, it can help improve communication. Many times a person will try to compensate for a hearing loss by nodding or remaining quiet. By asking someone to repeat what they heard, both parties can be aware of misunderstandings or “missed” communication. If these techniques fail to provide hearing loss awareness, make an appointment with an audiologist for Baseline hearing testing. This is a good health practice. Hearing testing should be a part of an annual physical. Many people are less reluctant to have a hearing test if they are accompanying a friend or family member to their test. Use this “buddy system” to open the door for a hearing loss consultation with your audiologist.

Recognizing the presence of a hearing loss is only the first step in receiving treatment. Hearing aids are not a cure for hearing loss. The hearing aid is just that – an aid. Hearing aids do not reverse the neural damage seen in most non-medically treatable hearing losses. A hearing aid WILL improve signal detection, help stimulate auditory memory and help keep processing skills active. Sometimes there is too much background noise to hold an easy conversation. Sometimes people do talk too fast or mumble. The goal of a hearing aid would be to provide the same hearing difficulties that normal hearing ears experience. Today's technology is incredible. Hearing aids can adapt to the environment, learn your listening preferences, and distinguish speech from noise. In many cases today's hearing aids are small, light weight and durable. They range in price to meet almost every budget.

Helen Keller said that blindness kept her from “things” while deafness kept her from “people”. Get your hearing tested. Wear your hearing aids. Stay connected to the people in your life.