

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
www.astate.edu/conhp



Hearing Loss

Introduction

Hearing loss is a common occurrence with age, probably more common than once thought. The Hearing Health Foundations states that “between the year 2000 and 2015, the number of Americans with hearing loss has doubled.” According to the Arkansas Geriatric Education Collaborative, about 15 percent, or 37.5 million people in the U.S. have hearing loss. The American Academy of Audiology (ACA) states that hearing loss is the third most common health problem in the U.S., only behind heart disease and arthritis. Hearing loss can affect people of all ages and takes a toll on everyday life. Healthy People 2020 states one of the objectives is to “reduce the prevalence and severity of disorders of hearing and balance.” Understanding hearing loss, recognizing the signs and symptoms, and knowing when and where to go for help can not only reduce the number of Americans with untreated hearing loss, but also improve the quality of life for those with hearing loss and their loved ones.

What is Hearing Loss?

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), there are two general types of hearing loss:

- Sensorineural:
 - Occurs with damage to the inner ear and auditory nerve
 - Is often permanent

- Conductive
 - Occurs when sound waves are prevented from reaching the inner ear
 - Can be treated

Presbycusis is age-related hearing loss that can usually be treated. It often occurs in both ears and comes on gradually. The insidious onset often prevents a person from realizing they are losing their hearing and contributes to the large occurrence of untreated hearing loss. Other causes of hearing loss include exposure to loud noises, earwax or fluid buildup, ear drum puncture, medication side effects, chronic disease, and heredity.

The Impact of Hearing Loss

The inability to hear well affects the person’s everyday life and relationships. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), “hearing loss has been linked to feelings of depression, anxiety, frustration, social isolation, and fatigue.” It is easy to imagine that the inability to both hear and communicate effectively within the home and community can have psychological effects. In addition, ASHA states that the use of hearing aids “positively affected quality of life for both the hearing aid wearer and his or her significant other.” Additionally, doctors at Johns Hopkins University have recently linked hearing loss with problems like trouble walking, falls,

and dementia. These studies found that mild hearing loss doubled dementia risk, moderate loss tripled the risk, and those with severe hearing loss were at five times the risk of developing dementia. Clearly, the inability to hear well translates to decreased quality of life and poorer health.

Risk Factors

There are many risk factors associated with hearing loss. Some of those include:

- Loud noises such as machinery, lawn mowers, concerts, and sporting events, and even personal devices
- Age is absolutely a risk factor, with incidence increasing with age.
 - Although being young does not mean you cannot develop hearing loss
- Genetic factors
- Ear infections or chronic diseases
- Having a low income is a risk factor secondary to lack of treatment for hearing loss

The ACA states that “approximately 30 million workers are exposed to hazardous levels of noise on the job” and “1.1 billion

people are at risk for hearing loss due to unsafe personal use of portable music devices.” Additionally, the Hearing Health Foundation says that 3 out of 5 veterans returning from war are affected by hearing loss. Although age is a risk factor for hearing loss, the ACA states that about half of those with hearing loss are younger than 65 and “approximately one in eight children ages 6 to 19 have noise-induced hearing loss.” Clearly, many people are at risk of hearing loss.

Signs and Symptoms

The NIH lists the following signs of hearing loss:

- Trouble hearing over the telephone
- Trouble following conversations when two or more people are talking
- Often asking people to repeat what they are saying
- Needing to turn up the TV volume so loud that others complain
- Having a problem hearing due to background noise
- Thinking that others seem to mumble
- Unable to understand when women and children speak to you

Tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, can also accompany hearing loss.

Lack of Treatment

Lack of treatment is a widespread issue and can be due to many things including unawareness, cost, and lack of resources. Hearing aids can be expensive with an average cost of \$1,675 per ear according to Johns Hopkins. However, Arkansas is one of a few states that has laws requiring hearing aid coverage for adults. According to ASHA, Arkansas “requires insurance companies to offer coverage to employers in the

state. If the employer chooses to add this option, the health plan must provide hearing aid coverage of no less than \$1,400 per ear every three years for individuals of all ages.”

Reach out to your current insurance provider to see if you have hearing coverage under your plan. Cost can be a barrier, but the cost of hearing loss may be greater than that of hearing aids.

Technology

According to Everyday Hearing, a personal sound amplification product (PSAP) is a low-cost device that amplifies sound and can be obtained without prescription or hearing evaluation. However, it is not tailored to the patient and does not account for sound distortions. The advantages are the decreased cost, the accessibility, and the relative effectiveness. AARP reports the devices average \$250-\$350. Also, some sync to your phone and allow the user to answer phone calls and listen to music. The disadvantages are that those who purchase a PSAP without visiting a professional may not get treatment for potentially serious health conditions that can be causing the hearing loss. A better plan may be to receive a hearing test and ask your audiologist or practitioner about PSAPs.

Resources

If you suspect you or someone you know may have hearing loss, some important resources are listed below. Contact your family doctor to inquire about hearing testing and treatment. Schools also often have hearing screenings for younger children. If you suspect your child may have a hearing issue, contact the school to inquire about screenings or your family doctor or pediatrician.

- **National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**
1-800-241-1044 (toll-free)
1-800-241-1055 (TTY/toll-free)
nidcdinfo@nidcd.nih.gov
www.nidcd.nih.gov

- **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**
1-800-638-8255
actioncenter@asha.org
www.asha.org
- **Better Hearing Institute**
202-975-0905
mail@betterhearing.org
<http://www.betterhearing.org/hearingpedia/hearing-loss-resources>
- **Speech and Hearing Center on campus**
870-972-3301
Reynolds Room 101
Hours: M-Th 9-6 and F 8-5
https://www.astate.edu/college/conhp/departments/communication-disorders/shc/index_dot

References

- <https://aqec.uams.edu/2017/01/27/treating-hearing-loss-in-older-adults/>
- [https://www.audiology.org/sites/default/files/AAM%20Poster%20\(40x60\).pdf](https://www.audiology.org/sites/default/files/AAM%20Poster%20(40x60).pdf)
- <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topic-objectives/topic/hearing-and-other-sensory-or-communication-disorders>
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/hearing-loss-common-problem-older-adults>
- <https://www.asha.org/articles/untreated-hearing-loss-in-adults/>
- https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_body/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss
- <https://hearinghealthfoundation.org/hearing-loss-tinnitus-statistics/>
- https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/issues/ha_reimbursement/
- <http://www.betterhearing.org/hearingpedia/hearing-loss-resources>
- <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2015/hearing-amplifiers-psaps.html>
- <https://www.everydayhearing.com/hearing-technology/articles/best-psap/>

Other News:

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Katie Sellers, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.