

HEARING LOSS FACT SHEET

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About 34.25 million Americans have hearing loss and about 20% have done something about it.

Hearing loss affects individuals of all ages. Knowing what to look for and what can be done to improve a person's hearing will allow these people to get the hearing healthcare they deserve.

Many people are aware that they have some degree of hearing loss but are reluctant to do anything about it. Knowing what to look for and who to refer to, you can empower your patients with the knowledge that there is a way to overcome their hearing loss.

Factors affecting hearing include:

- ✓ noise exposure (social, occupational)
- ✓ medical conditions (diabetes, heart, thyroid, circulation problems)
- ✓ ototoxic medications (aminoglycosides, cisplatin, carboplatin)
- ✓ age

Hearing loss, in the average adult, tends to gradually decline with time until it seems that all of a sudden you can no longer hear. At this time one may attempt to tell their physician about their hearing loss or will usually exhibit signs of possible hearing loss.

Signs of hearing loss include:

- ✓ withdrawing from family and social activities
- ✓ decrease in quality of life

- ✓ asking people to repeat themselves
- ✓ trouble hearing in background noise
- ✓ turning up the volume on audio devices
- ✓ complaining of people mumbling
- ✓ ringing in the ears
- ✓ complaints of depression, fatigue and/or stress

Asking our patients about their hearing and issuing a simple screening exam (i.e., Hearing Handicap Inventory – Screening), you can determine with your patient if a referral to a hearing healthcare provider is recommended. By not inquiring you may not realize that your patient is having hearing difficulties if they do not say anything to you. Your office can prove an acoustically controlled listening environment making it easier for your patient to converse with you.

Otolaryngologists and Audiologists treat and diagnose hearing loss and balance disorders. Referring a hearing impaired patient to one of these professionals will start them on the road to obtaining appropriate hearing healthcare. First the patient will see an Audiologist who will determine the type and degree of hearing loss present.

Three types of hearing loss:

- 1) conductive
- 2) sensorineural
- 3) mixed

About 20 of hearing loss cases are conductive indicating the middle and/or outer ear are contributing to the cause of hearing loss. These cases are usually treated medically or surgically with a complete or partial improvement in hearing.

The other 80% or so is sensorineural, which results from damage to the inner ear and/or auditory nerve. The cause is harder to determine and is typically irreversible and permanent. These cases are best treated with amplification devices (i.e., hearing aids and assistive listening devices).

The last type of hearing loss is mixed hearing loss, which contains a conductive and a sensorineural component. These types of hearing losses may benefit from medical attention and/or amplification devices.

Once the Audiologist has determined the type and degree of hearing loss present, the patient will then most likely see an Otolaryngologist. S/he will determine if there are any medical conditions affecting the person's hearing that can be medically or surgically treated or any contraindications that would prevent the use of amplification devices if this were the only treatable option.