

# Hearing Loss and Depression

Hearing loss could affect many different people and age groups. It could be caused by hereditary factors, natural aging, injury to head, earwax build up, ear infections, or exposure to noise. As we age our sensory abilities diminish. Hearing loss is the third most common long-term health problem in older Americans and affects up to 40 out of 100 people age 65 and older, and up to 80 out of 100 people older than 85(National Institute of Health). Hearing loss can cause sufferer's to feel isolated, anxious, self conscious, lonely, and disconnected. If someone is experiencing hearing loss it could certainly make life less enjoyable.

This problem is not just confined to older adults. Children as young as three weeks old could be diagnosed as having a hearing deficit. About 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born deaf or hard-of-hearing and approximately 15 percent (26 million) of Americans between the ages of 20 and 69 have high frequency hearing loss due to exposure to loud sounds or noise at work or in leisure activities(National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders ). Hearing loss in children could affect grades, self confidence, and peer relations. Since children are not always able to articulate their problems, identifying the problem makes it more challenging.

In a 2010 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers found a 31 percent increase in teenage hearing loss. The study compared teens in 2005 and 2006 to teens tested from 1988 to 1994. According to the research, called the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the results show that "one in five U.S. adolescents 12 to 19 years old demonstrated hearing loss." (Deafness research Foundation).

For older adults, certain settings for them may provide challenges. Rooms with particular structures may make it more difficult to hear (acoustics). Background noise could also factor into ability to hear others. Lastly, certain pitches in voices (usually higher ones) are hard to decipher. The impact could be felt at work (business meetings), social, and family relations (being able to communicate with children or grandkids).

There are preventive measures individuals can do in avoiding hearing loss. For some, it may not be avoidable (hereditary factors and aging). Here are some suggestions:

- Children should have periodic hearing exams (once every few years).
- Avoid exposure to loud noises
- Avoiding long exposure to music listening devices(IPods, MP3 players, I phones)
- When exposed to settings with loud noise, wear ear wax, if possible.
- Be conscious when buying items such as dishwashers, washers, and dryers. There is a difference in products when it comes to amplitude.
- If exposed to loud noises and it is unavoidable, try to limit time that you are exposed it.
- If you experience hearing loss, let others know about it. Accommodations could be made that would increase your ability to hear others. Time of day (visiting restaurant in non busy time), locations (acoustics) and seating arrangements (face to face) could greatly increase communications.

- Talk with your doctor or audiologist. Hearing aids can make a tremendous difference in hearing impaired lives. There are many advances in technology and hearing aids are less intrusive and noticeable as they once were.

Hearing loss may open new challenges in life. For the elderly it may mean another loss they experience. Discussing your concerns with others could develop the support you are looking for. If you or someone else is experiencing hearing loss and having a hard time with it, consider joining a support group or seeing a therapist. This could not only provide additional support, but some coping strategies as well.