

Hearing Loss

Three reasons why treatment is important—and how a hearing aid could help.

In the U.S., hearing loss is on the rise. Recent numbers show that significant hearing loss affects 48 million people throughout the country.¹

Although this health concern is more common among the aging population (1 out of 3 people over age 65 have some degree of loss¹), there's a growing prevalence at all ages. Even people in their 30s, 40s and 50s are experiencing hearing loss, often due to repeated noise exposure and environmental factors.

Noise-induced hearing damage.

Perhaps surprisingly, more than half of U.S. adults with hearing damage from noise do not have noisy jobs.² While work environments are a factor in many cases, our everyday activities provide more exposure to loud noise than we may think. These causes of hearing loss are irreversible—though completely preventable.³

Mowing the lawn, using a leaf blower, going to concerts, attending sporting events and listening to music with ear buds are just a few of the common offenders. Sounds that are 85 decibels or higher can cause loss or other hearing problems, like tinnitus (ringing in the ears). The louder a sound is and the longer a person listens to it, the more it can damage their hearing.⁴

Additional sources of potentially damaging noise and their decibel levels include:⁵



Prolonged exposure and/or close proximity to the noise without protection can result in gradual hearing loss over time, which may be difficult to notice.

Why treatment is important.

Hearing loss has an obvious impact on a person's ability to understand others. But the negative effects of untreated hearing loss go far beyond effective communication, with impacts seen in these 3 areas:

1 Social and Emotional Health

Exclusion from conversation can have a significant impact on everyday life, causing feelings of loneliness, isolation and frustration, particularly among older people. Left untreated for long enough, these feelings may further develop into issues such as anxiety, paranoia or depression.

2 Physical and Cognitive Health

Hearing loss has also been linked to a variety of other health concerns and is often related to cognitive decline and impaired learning. Research has even shown that people with untreated hearing loss may experience an increased risk of more serious health concerns, including:

- Alzheimer's and dementia
- Chronic kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Depression
- Falling

3 Productivity and Financial Health

Untreated hearing loss can have a profound effect among the working-age population. Adults with hearing loss have a much higher unemployment rate, and those who are employed have a higher percentage of being in lower grades of employment compared with the general workforce.⁶ Lifetime earnings for those with untreated hearing loss average 50%–70% less than their typical-hearing peers in the U.S., and household incomes may experience a negative impact of up to \$12,000 per year.⁷

Hearing aids: An effective tool.

For those with hearing loss, there is good news. Technological advancements have resulted in hearing aids that provide crisp and clear listening assistance, helping to address the previously mentioned issues and provide a better quality of life.

According to a study on hearing aid use from the National Institutes of Health, 72% of those tested benefited significantly from using a hearing aid. The study concluded that using a hearing aid affects daily activities of patients slightly or moderately and increases their communication skills.⁸

Today's devices not only feature powerful sound enhancement, they offer the convenience of rechargeable batteries, wireless connectivity, direct phone streaming, directional microphones and more. Devices are also much smaller than they used to be, making them less noticeable so users can wear them with confidence. Finally, many different styles also exist, helping to ensure a proper, comfortable fit for extended wear.



Is a hearing aid right for you?

If you think you may be experiencing hearing loss and are curious about hearing aids, UnitedHealthcare Hearing offers an online hearing test. This quick test can help determine if there's a need to see a professional for further evaluation and a hearing aid fitting. To take the test, visit UHChearing.com/test.



¹ Center for Hearing and Communication. Statistics and facts about hearing loss. chchearing.org/facts-about-hearing-loss/. November 2017.

² Centers for Disease Control. "Too Loud! For Too Long!" cdc.gov/vitalsigns/hearingloss/index.html. Accessed April 6, 2020.

³ Hearing Loss Association of America. "Noise-induced hearing loss is preventable." hearingloss.org/hearing-help/hearing-loss-basics/prevention/. Accessed April 6, 2020.

⁴ National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. "Listen Up! Protect Your Hearing (infographic)." nidcd.nih.gov/health/listen-infographic. Accessed April 6, 2020.

⁵ National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. "Noise-Induced Hearing Loss." nidcd.nih.gov/health/noise-induced-hearing-loss. Accessed April 6, 2020.

⁶ World Health Organization. Deafness and hearing loss. who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss. Accessed March 2020.

⁷ Hearing Health Foundation. "Making a Sound Investment." hearinghealthfoundation.org/blogs/tag/Quality+of+life. Accessed April 28, 2020.

⁸ U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. "Study of hearing aid effectiveness and patient satisfaction." ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26050856. Accessed April 6, 2020.

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