

# HEARING LOSS

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **How common is hearing loss?**

About 20 percent of Americans, 48 million, report some degree of hearing loss. At age 65, one out of three people has a hearing loss. At 75 and older, half have a disabling hearing loss. Estimates are that 60 percent of the people with hearing loss are either in the work force or in educational settings.

### **What causes hearing loss?**

Causes of hearing loss include a genetic predisposition, ear disease, noise exposure (including music, industrial, military and more), ototoxic medicines, head trauma, and others. As we age, our ears are exposed to a lifetime of noise such as lawnmowers, telephones, industrial machinery, leaf blowers, chain saws, industrial noise, hair dryers, firearms, and recorded and loud music. Many of these sounds occur at loud and potentially injurious levels. Although some people are born with hearing loss, most acquire hearing loss later in life.

### **What are ototoxic medications?**

Certain medications are called "Ototoxic" (oto = ear, toxic = poison). They can cause temporary or permanent damage to the inner ear. Some ototoxic drugs include medications used to treat serious infections, cancer, and heart disease. Check with your doctor if you notice a ringing in your ears or a decrease in hearing while taking a medication. Your pharmacist is a good resource to help identify drugs that could affect your hearing.

### **What can I do to protect my hearing from noise induced hearing loss?**

Noise-induced hearing loss is 100 percent preventable. Potential damage to the inner ear from noise is determined by the loudness of the sound and the amount of time you are exposed. You can protect your hearing by wearing hearing protection or avoiding noises at or above 85 decibels. These include lawnmowers, snowblowers, motorcycles, firecrackers, and loud music.

### **If I had hearing loss, wouldn't my doctor have told me?**

Unfortunately, only a small fraction of physicians routinely screen for hearing loss. Since many people with hearing loss hear much better in quiet environments (like your doctor's office), it may not be obvious to your physician. A trained hearing professional can determine the severity of your hearing problem, whether or not you could benefit from a hearing aid, and which type would be best for you.

### **How do I know if I have a hearing loss?**

You should have your hearing tested if you: Require frequent repetition; have difficulty following conversations involving more than 2 people; think that other people sound muffled or like they're mumbling, have difficulty hearing in noisy situations such as conferences, restaurants, malls, or crowded meeting rooms; have trouble hearing children's and women's voices; have your TV or radio turned up to a high volume; answer or respond inappropriately in conversations; have ringing in your ears; intently watch people's faces when they speak with you (possible lip reading).

### **What are the most common causes of hearing loss?**

The most common cause is exposure to excessive noise and other causes are genetics, birth defects, infections of the head or ear, aging, and reaction to drugs or cancer treatment. Hearing loss is often progressive – meaning it gets worse with time.

### **Will a hearing aid restore my hearing?**

No hearing aid can restore hearing to “normal”. Hearing aids are designed to let you hear soft sounds that you could not hear before while preventing loud sounds from becoming uncomfortably loud. They are designed to improve your ability to understand speech even in noisy environments although such environments can still be challenging.

### **How can a hearing aid help me hear better?**

Hearing aids help you hear better by taking in sound through a microphone, boosting and modifying those to match the pattern of your hearing loss and then sending it to your ear canal. This will allow you to hear sounds of those frequencies your unaided ear cannot hear. In addition to amplification, the hearing healthcare provider can adjust many settings that can be modified to improve your ability to understand speech – even in noisy environments. Using multiple settings, you can select which one works best in various surroundings.

### **What, besides hearing aids, is available to help me hear better?**

There are devices that will help you hear without hearing aids such as amplified telephones, or personal sound amplifiers, as well as alerting systems that use flashing lights instead of sound to let you know when something requires your attention. Other devices work with your hearing aids through a secondary receiver called a telecoil – or T-coil. There are many more devices that will help you hear better when using your T-coil in your hearing aids. These are called “assistive listening devices.” You can learn about them from the New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

### **If I have a hearing loss, will it go away?**

Some types of hearing loss may only be temporary and go away with time or changes in medication and some can be reversed by medical intervention. In the vast majority of cases your hearing will get worse as time passes. Early recognition and treatment can help slow down or prevent associated problems from developing such as cognitive decline or deteriorating personal relationships.

### **If my hearing loss is mild, can I wait to address it?**

Unaddressed hearing loss not only affects your ability to hear sounds accurately, but it also puts a strain on your listening ability. Over time, the ability to listen accurately can decline, especially if your hearing loss continues to worsen. The sooner you seek amplification and you begin to adjust to hearing with hearing aids, your degree of success will be much higher.



## **Hearing Loss Awareness**

of the State of New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability - Toll-Free: 1-877-696-1470 • Local: 505-841-4464 • Website: [www.gcd.state.nm.us](http://www.gcd.state.nm.us) and  
the New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Toll-Free: 1-800-489-8536 • Local: 505-383-6530 • Website: [www.cdhh.state.nm.us](http://www.cdhh.state.nm.us)