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MYTHS ABOUT HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss affects only "old people" and is merely a sign of aging. Only 35% of people with hearing loss are older than age 64. There are close to six million people in the U.S. between the ages of 18 and 44 with hearing loss, and more than one million are school age. Hearing loss affects all age groups.

If I had a hearing loss, my family doctor would have told me. Not true! Only 14% of physicians routinely screen for hearing loss during a physical. Since most people with hearing impairments hear well in a quiet environment like a doctor's office, it can be virtually impossible for your physician to recognize the extent of your problem. Without special training, and an understanding of the nature of hearing loss, it may be difficult for your doctor to even realize that you have a hearing problem.

My hearing loss is normal for my age. Isn't this a strange way to look at things? But, do you realize that well-meaning doctors tell this to their patients every day? It happens to be "normal" for overweight people to have high blood pressure. That doesn't mean they should not receive treatment for the problem.

Your hearing loss cannot be helped. In the past, many people with hearing loss in one ear, with a high frequency hearing loss, or with nerve damage have all been told they cannot be helped, often by their family practice physician. This might have been true many years ago, but with modern advances in technology, nearly 95% of people with a sensorineural hearing loss can be helped with hearing aids.

The consequences of hiding hearing loss are better than wearing hearing aids. What price are you paying for vanity? Untreated hearing loss is far more noticeable than hearing aids. If you miss a punch line to a joke, or respond inappropriately in conversation, people may have concerns about your mental acuity, your attention span or your ability to communicate effectively. The personal consequences of vanity can be life altering. At a simplistic level, untreated hearing loss means giving up some of the pleasant sounds you used to enjoy. At a deeper level, vanity could severely reduce the quality of your life.

Only people with serious hearing loss need hearing aids. The need for hearing amplification is dependent on your lifestyle, your need for refined hearing, and the degree of your hearing loss. If you are a lawyer, teacher or a group psychotherapist, where very refined hearing is necessary to discern the nuances of human communication, then even a mild hearing loss can be intolerable. If you live in a rural area by yourself and seldom socialize, then perhaps you are someone who is tolerant of even moderate hearing losses.

Hearing aids will make me look "older" and "handicapped." Looking older is clearly more affected by almost all other factors besides hearing aids. It is not the hearing aids that make one look older, it is what one may believe they imply. If hearing aids help you function like a normal hearing person, for all intents and purposes, the stigma is removed. Hearing aid manufacturers are well aware that cosmetics is an issue to many people, and that's why today we have hearing aids that are "virtually invisible". But more importantly, keep in mind that "an untreated hearing loss is more obvious than a hearing aid." Smiling and nodding your head when you don't understand what's being said, makes your condition more apparent than the largest hearing aid.

Hearing aids will make everything sound too loud. Hearing aids are amplifiers. At one time, the way that hearing aids were designed, it was necessary to turn up the power in order to hear soft speech (or other soft sounds). Then, normal conversation indeed would have been too loud. With today's hearing aids, however, the circuit works automatically, only providing the amount of amplification needed based on the input level. In fact, many hearing aids today don't have a volume control.

Signs of Hearing Loss

Take this quiz to discover whether or not you are experiencing signs of hearing loss:

- Do you often miss certain words?
- Do you frequently ask the speaker to repeat what was said?
- Have family members or friends expressed concern about your hearing?
- Do you avoid certain social situations (the theater, restaurants) because it is difficult to hear?
- Do you have a history of work-related noise exposure?
- Do you have difficulty understanding telephone conversations?
- Do you turn up the radio or television to volume levels that are too loud for others?
- Do you have difficulty following conversations in groups or in the presence of background noise?
- Do you experience ringing or buzzing sounds in one or both ears?

