

HEARING LOSS AND YOUR PRACTICE



What every physician
needs to know about
hearing loss

Hearing loss is a health problem

Hearing plays an important role in the mental, emotional and physical well-being of your patients. You can be an important source of information for your patients who are hearing impaired.

Hearing loss is the third most common chronic health condition affecting the aging population, and the numbers are increasing in younger populations as well. 20% of adults over 65, 40% over 75 and 80% of nursing home residents have a significant hearing problem. Furthermore, 6-12% of seniors experience speech, language or voice difficulties.



In some cases, hearing loss is a symptom of a more serious medical problem warranting intervention. In most of your patients, however, hearing loss is a chronic, non-pathological degenerative process that can be properly managed with hearing aids and other assistive listening devices.

About 95% of all hearing losses occur in the cochlea, resulting in “sensorineural hearing loss”– what many people call “nerve deafness.” In sensorineural hearing loss, damage occurs to the cilia, or hair cells, in the inner ear, resulting in irreversible hearing loss. The most common causes of sensorineural hearing loss are noise exposure, aging and hereditary predisposition. Fortunately, the vast majority of persons with this sensorineural hearing loss respond very well to amplification.

Only 5% of hearing losses are “conductive,” resulting from structural or mechanical damage to the outer ear and/or middle ear. In many of these patients, medical or surgical treatment can result in partial or complete reversal of the hearing loss. Some common causes of conductive hearing loss are wax impaction, eardrum perforation, middle ear fluid, cholesteotoma and congenital problems.

② The early signs of hearing loss

The following simple questions can assist you in determining whether your patient needs a hearing test/audiological assesment:

- Does he or she ask others to repeat, especially women and children?
- Do others complain that he or she turns the TV or radio volume too loud?
- Does he or she have difficulty understanding speech in groups and/or noisy places?
- Does he or she have trouble hearing at a distance?
- Does he or she complain of ringing in either or both ears?
- Does he or she hear better in one ear than the other?
- Does he or she complain that others mumble?



The dangers of untreated hearing loss

Hearing loss adversely affects hearing-impaired persons' quality of life. Adverse effects on family relationships, enjoyment of social activities and work performance have all been carefully documented. Danger from failure to hear warning signals and even doctor's instructions regarding medications have also been reported. Additionally, untreated hearing loss can cause social isolation, cause or worsen emotional disorders and strain interpersonal relationships. A hearing loss can be mistaken for inattentiveness, memory disorders or mental slowness.

Ideally, all patients should be screened regularly. Self-assessment forms for your patients can be completed in your waiting room and those who report hearing problems can be referred for a complete audiological evaluation if indicated. Additionally, patients at risk for hearing loss, including those over age 50 and those who present symptoms, should be checked.

Other symptoms and reports that warrant referral to a hearing health care practitioner include:

- Active ear drainage
- Pain or discomfort in the ear
- Progressive hearing loss within the previous 90 days
- Sudden onset of loss in one ear
- Acute or chronic dizziness
- Tinnitus

👁️ Hearing loss can be gradual

Of special importance is the understanding that a quiet exam room may allow you to miss hearing loss if it is based strictly on observation. Additionally, the typically gradual onset of hearing loss may result in the patient being unaware (or in denial) of a problem. Family members and significant others are much more likely to notice and report the problem.

👁️ Hearing aid styles



CIC



Mini Canal



ITC



Half Shell



ITE



BTE



Micro BTE



Super Power BTE



RITE BTE

② The facts about hearing aids

Following the completion of a comprehensive evaluation, hearing aids may be recommended. Many factors are considered in making a specific recommendation, including the patient's hearing loss, communication needs, lifestyle and preferences.

For most people with hearing loss in both ears, using hearing aids in both ears offers significant advantages, including improvement in speech understanding in both quiet and noisy situations and better ability to localize sound sources.

Patients who have "nerve deafness" and high-frequency hearing loss can and do benefit from the use of hearing aids in most cases. Over 95% of patients with hearing loss can successfully wear hearing aids. With the increasing sophistication of the audiologic testing process and test equipment, newborns are accurately evaluated and fit successfully with hearing aids. Many provinces have implemented newborn hearing screening programs to provide testing and fitting protocols for this population.

A trial period to allow for necessary fine-tuning and adjustments should be provided for acclimating to the use of hearing aids. You can aid in this acclimation by helping your patients understand that, in the same way that glasses do not "cure" vision deficits, hearing aids do not "cure" hearing loss. However, hearing aids can provide a dramatic difference in both your patient's life and the lives of their family and significant others.

Conclusion

For reasons both known and unknown, only about 25% of all hearing-impaired persons choose to do something about their hearing loss. **Your medical recommendation is the most important factor for motivating patients to seek help.** Early detection and treatment are major determinants in the success of any rehabilitation effort.

Hearing Care Professional Stamp Here

Hearing and understanding are basic human needs. Hearing problems and the resulting social consequences represent a challenge for society. We believe in a world in which people with restricted hearing can communicate again without limitation thanks to advanced technology.

For more information about hearing and hearing loss: **www.bernafon.com**

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