

Hearing Loss: Things to consider for Canmore Life Long Learners

New research from multiple longitudinal aging studies shows that there is a higher than previously expected prevalence of hearing loss in Canada. **Did you know** that approximately 18% of the population over 18 suffers from hearing loss and **47% of people over 60** have hearing loss in at least one ear?

Even though these numbers are staggering, a full three quarters of individuals with hearing loss **do nothing about it**. One of the reasons is that hearing loss is often gradual, and individuals don't realize how much trouble they are having. It is often friends and family or caregivers who point out hearing difficulties to us. Other factors include stigma around the issue of hearing loss and hearing aids, as well as financial concerns of the expense of getting help.

Regardless of the reasons for people waiting to do something about their hearing loss, research clearly shows that **early identification and treatment of hearing loss is critical in order to keep the brain working properly**. John Hopkins Medical Centre (2014) showed that the auditory and memory portions of the brain deteriorate if hearing loss goes untreated for 4 years or more.

Recently published research in 3600 participants over 25 years showed that **individuals who wore hearing aids if required, had reduced cognitive decline as compared to individuals who did not wear hearing aids** when they had hearing loss (Journal of the Geriatric Society of America, October 2015).

The most common type of hearing loss is due to the natural wear and tear of the hair cells in the inner ear from aging. These cells deteriorate over time and cannot be repaired. The most effective type of medical treatment for this 'sensorineural' hearing loss is hearing aids. Hearing aids can be very effective, however it's important to understand that they are only able to improve the sound being delivered to the ear. The **brain is always required to interpret the sounds**. This is why some people have more difficulty than others adapting to hearing aids and hearing effectively with them. The sooner the brain is reconnected to sound via hearing devices, the better outcome people have. Additionally, there are some situations that are more challenging for hearing aids to function, including very noisy backgrounds where speech is present.

Realize that hearing aids for hearing loss are an important part of the hearing loss treatment process, however they are **only one part**. If you or your loved one has hearing loss, try to learn as much as you can about it. There are simple techniques that can help you hear better in different environments such as watching what people say (known as lip-reading or speechreading), getting your communication partner to get your attention before they speak to you, and getting closer to the sound source that you want to hear. There are **new assistive devices** that work through Bluetooth that are very capable at getting sound sent from the sound source of interest (like your TV or iPad, or spouse across the room for example) directly to your ears.

Did you know that **ALL** individuals, even those with normal hearing, have **more difficulty hearing in a noisy situation**? That's because our brain has more difficulty filtering out background noise after age 30. There is a well researched listening training program that can help keep up your listening skills if you have hearing loss, or simply difficulty listening in background noise. The LACE (listening and communication enhancement) program focuses on training the auditory part of your brain to recognize the initial part of words more quickly. Research from Northwestern University shows that there is a quicker electrical response at the brain to auditory stimuli after completing this program. We have a

simple and effective test available in our offices to determine the severity of any listening in noise impairment that you may have and can determine if this program could be helpful to you.

If you want to find out more about your hearing or have issues with your hearing that you'd like to address, feel free to contact our clinics. We are here to help you **hear your world better**.

Signs and symptoms of hearing loss include:

- More difficulty hearing women and children's voices
- Turning up the tv louder than friends or family
- Increased difficulty understanding what is being said in a noisy place
- Withdrawing from activities where it is difficult to hear
- Hearing people speaking but not understanding what they say
- Asking people to repeat themselves frequently
- Feeling that people mumble all the time
- Constant ringing or buzzing in the ears

If you experience **2 or more of these symptoms**, or if you are 60+ and have never had a hearing test, we recommend a thorough hearing evaluation.

This information was provided by Dr. Carrie Scarff, Registered Audiologist at Audiology Innovations (www.audiologyinnovations.ca) and Board member of Deaf and Hear Alberta. Her and her colleagues can be reached at her clinics in Calgary for hearing consultations appointments at 403-252-4722.