

Hillcrest Hearing News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Spring 2010

Your Healthy Hearing Check-up

Regular hearing healthcare check-ups help ensure that you're hearing as well as possible. Your regular check-up includes the following:

1. Check your hearing. We'll compare the results to your previous hearing levels. If we find any change, we'll recommend treatment or adjust your hearing aids to compensate for the change.

2. Check your ear canals. Earwax is one of the most common causes of hearing aid feedback (whistle) and hearing aid repairs.

3. Clean and adjust your hearing aids. Regular cleaning minimizes hearing aid repairs and makes sure that your hearing aids are providing the maximum benefit. *Sometimes a small re-programming of your hearing aids can make a noticeable improvement.*

4. Talk about other sources of help. This is a good time to ask about telephone amplifiers, clock and smoke alarms, and devices for television and group settings.

Your hearing deserves good care! Please call our office if you would like to schedule an appointment.

Medicare Benefit Includes Screening for Hearing Loss and Dizziness

Medicare beneficiaries are now entitled to a physical examination known as the "Welcome to Medicare" exam.

The medical examination includes a number of health care screenings, including screening for *hearing loss* and *balance difficulties*. The screening can be by a questionnaire rather than an actual test. If the results indicate possible hearing loss or dizziness, the physician should provide education, counseling and referral.

The benefit is available only to new beneficiaries and must be done within six months of your first coverage period.

Hearing loss is a common problem in those receiving Medicare benefits, affecting 25% to 40% of adults over 65 years of age. Many health organizations, including the U.S. Preventive Service Task Force, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Speech, Language and Hearing Association, recommend that hearing screening be part of the regular physical examination for this age group.

Making Television More Enjoyable

Difficulty with television is one of the most common complaints of people with hearing loss. In fact, family members' complaints about television being *too loud* are often what make a person seek help.

Once someone gets help, family members are usually happy immediately. The television is no longer driving them out of the family room.

Unfortunately, although television volume may now be lower, hearing difficulties often remain. Difficulty understanding speech on television remains one of the most common complaints of hearing aid users.

And watching television is a very important activity, especially in the over-65 age group. This group watches an average of six hours of TV a day.



Closed captioning of remarks by President Obama.

Why is TV such a challenge?

Rate: Televised speech is often twice as fast as normal conversation, making it much more difficult to understand.

Variety of speakers: There are often several different speakers on the same program, some who are easy to understand, and some who are not.

Background noise: Interfering noise can come from the television program itself (including background music) and from the viewer's home.

Those Loud TV Commercials

Television viewers have complained for years that commercials are often much louder than the programs they're sponsoring.

Federal legislation may do something about that complaint. The proposed legislation would *require* broadcasters to follow recently developed guidelines on how to process and transmit audio in a more uniform way. Those guidelines are now voluntary.

Even with the guidelines in place, some commercials may seem louder if they follow a quiet scene. "Sound spikes, such as screeching tires or loud voices, will always seem loud," an industry spokesman said. "That's just the nature of sound."

The sound system: Televisions usually have small speakers and the sound quality may not be ideal. Some people understand televised speech better when they turn off the "stereo" setting.

Making TV more enjoyable

There are several ways to improve television viewing. These include *closed captioning* and *augmentative systems*.

Closed captioning allows you to see written text displayed on the television screen. It's turned on using the menu button on your TV remote. Although reading every word isn't necessary, many people don't like reading while watching television.

Augmentative systems transmit the sound directly to the viewer. These systems include *direct loop*, *infrared*, and a recent development, *wireless Bluetooth* connection.

With **direct loop**, a thin wire is connected to the TV set and placed around the room. The hearing aid user puts his or her hearing aid settings on "T" (telecoil) and the TV sound is received directly at the hearing aids.

Infrared and RF (radio frequency) systems convert the TV sound to light or radio waves and transmit them to the viewer, who wears a lightweight headset. This system is used in many theaters.

Bluetooth is a recent development in hearing aids. An adapter wirelessly transmits sound from the television to hearing aids that are Bluetooth enabled.

A recent study demonstrated the benefits of augmentative systems. Ten hearing aid users listened to television with their hearing aids alone and with an augmentative system (in this case, wireless Bluetooth). The listeners understood *twice as much* using the augmentative system.

Why are augmentative systems so helpful? These devices allow you to listen at whatever volume you choose (without bothering anyone else) and more importantly, without being affected by room noise.

Join The Cause

Hearing loss is a national health problem in the United States with over 31 million people affected. Untreated hearing loss has significant physical, psychological, emotional and occupational consequences. To raise awareness about the seriousness of hearing loss, we are promoting the **Second Annual 5k Walk 4 Hearing** in Dayton. This is a fundraising event for Hearing Loss Association of America, the largest consumer advocacy group for people with hearing loss.

The WALK4 Hearing is **Saturday, May 15**, at Carillon Park, starting at 10 am with registration beginning at 9 am. **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** We need sponsors, volunteers, team captains, and walkers! You can join our team or create your own. Call 424-8519 or 435-7476 for more information, or visit www.Walk4Hearing.org and click on the Dayton location. Join the cause for better hearing by supporting Dayton's Second Annual **Walk4Hearing**. Help make Hearing Loss an issue of national concern!

Sincerely,

The Audiologists, Dispensers and Staff of Hillcrest Hearing Aids

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We now accept used hearing aid batteries for recycling.

Ear Candling: More Harm Than Good

Ear candling—also known as *ear coning*—has its roots in ancient healing practices in China, Greece and Egypt. It is still advocated by some as an alternative health practice to remove earwax and to treat hay fever, headaches, sinusitis and tinnitus.

There are thousands of references to ear candling online. One wholesale distributor reported sales of 1,000 candles per week. A spa owner quoted in the *New York Times* claimed, "The candle can improve hearing and balance, and cleanse toxins left by medication." The spa charges \$75 for a treatment, which takes about 45 minutes.

Ear candles are hollow tubes of fabric soaked in beeswax. The tube is placed in the ear canal. The candle is lit, and burns for about 15 minutes. Supposedly, earwax is drawn out through the "chimney effect" produced by the burning candle.

Several experiments have demonstrated that ear candles do not actually remove earwax. The material deposited on the candle is the residue of the candle itself. Furthermore, there is no negative pressure (chimney effect) produced by the burning candle.

A survey of 122 otolaryngologists found that about 1/3 knew of at least one patient who used ear candling. Almost half of the physicians had treated patients with associated complications, including burns, external ear infection, blockage of the ear canal and one perforated eardrum.

One medical specialist recommended against ear candling because it is "implausible, demonstrably wrong, has no positive clinical effects and seems to be associated with considerable risk." It seems pretty clear: ear candling is a bad idea.

Ear protection

Anyone exposed to high levels of noise should protect his or her hearing through the use of *earplugs* or *earmuffs*. These are available from a number of sources, including you: local pharmacy or hardware store.

Custom made earplugs are more comfortable and more effective than over-the-counter versions.

For swimmers, custom *swim molds* prevent water from entering the ear canal. Swim molds are useful for anyone with middle ear tubes or with "swimmer's ears." *Please call our office if you would like more information on custom made ear protectors.*