

# Hillcrest Healthcare News<sup>®</sup>

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends

Fall 2012

## The Cost of Hearing Loss

Good hearing healthcare costs money. The cost of hearing testing, hearing aids, batteries and assistive listening devices all adds up. Although some insurance plans provide assistance, many do not.

But as significant as these costs are, the costs of untreated hearing loss are even greater.

Survey data from the Better Hearing Institute suggests that *untreated* hearing loss accounts for about \$100 billion in lost income every year. Lost income for untreated loss averaged from \$1,000 a year (for someone with a mild loss) to \$12,000 a year (for those with severe loss). That loss is cut in half for hearing aid users.

But there are also hidden costs of untreated hearing loss.

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Distractions such as cell phones, loud music and traffic can make driving a stressful experience. The challenges are even greater for drivers with hearing loss. Here are some suggestions for safe driving:

- Make frequent use of all side and rearview mirrors when changing lanes and passing.
- If having a conversation while driving distracts you, ask passengers not to communicate with you unless necessary. You can't read lips while driving!
- Keep the car radio volume to a minimum so you can hear traffic sounds.
- Using a cell phone while driving is definitely *not* recommended. Studies by the National Transportation Safety Board show that the use of *any* cell phone, including hands-free devices, causes significant distraction.
- Check your turn signal indicator occasionally to make sure it's not blinking needlessly. Many turn signals are difficult to hear over the sound of traffic, engine noise and the radio.

## Top 5 Reasons Why You Should Not Get Hearing Aids

Most people who read our newsletter have recognized and accepted that they have hearing loss, sought professional care, and now use hearing aids regularly. As a result, both they and their families enjoy a fuller and more enjoyable life.

But what about the person who has a significant hearing loss, but hasn't done anything about it? Believe it or not, many people with hearing loss have *not* taken any positive steps toward better hearing.

Perhaps there are reasons for not seeking professional help and reasons for not using hearing aids. Here are a few reasons we've heard—and some thoughts to consider.

### "My hearing isn't that bad."

Could be. But have you asked the people around you? You may not realize that the television is turned louder or that people have to repeat themselves for you to understand them. As the *New York Times* put it, hearing loss is "*often not obvious to others or even to those who have it.*"

### "People will see them."

Well, probably not. For the most part, *the only one who sees your hearing aids is you.* Walk around a shopping mall or any place where there are a lot of people and you'll pass a dozen people wearing hearing aids. Do you notice them?

What people *do* notice is someone who says, "*What did you say?*" or answers the wrong question, or sits quietly because he or she can't follow the conversation.

### "My family can talk a little louder."

It's not unusual for someone to be unaware that he or she has a hearing loss because family members talk louder and put up with loud television, and perhaps the loud voice of the person with the hearing loss. But is that fair to them?

Eventually, family members begin to talk less and less with the person with untreated hearing loss because the effort is just too much. Research shows that individuals who don't get help for their hearing loss gradually become more and more socially isolated.

### "Hearing aids are expensive."

Yes, they are. On the other hand, hearing aids are one of the few healthcare

items that have not increased in inflation-adjusted cost over the past 10 years, in spite of dramatic improvements in technology. As a result, people today get improved capabilities for less money.



People who don't get help for their hearing loss sometimes put special demands on the people around them.

### "Hearing aids don't help much."

Not true. What *is* true is that hearing aids don't restore normal hearing and can't make it possible to understand everything in a noisy restaurant or on every TV channel. In most cases, hearing aids allow you to hear pretty well *most of the time.* Hearing aids enable you to hear with less effort, to watch television at normal volume—and make it possible for the people around you to talk at a normal level and without repeating themselves.

There may be other reasons for putting off getting help, even though very effective help is available. But for many people, their feelings about their hearing loss is a more serious issue than the hearing loss itself, especially when those feelings prevent them from taking productive steps toward *hearing as well as possible.*

### Captioned Television

Did you know that your television set probably has *closed captioning* already available?

Most television programs are now captioned. Some live programs, such as baseball games, have *real-time captioning*, with someone typing the text as the announcer is speaking.

The captions are displayed when you turn on the built-in decoder. This is usually done using the television remote control, under the option "*menu*" or "*program.*"

# Read Your Phone Calls!

Amplified telephones and hearing aid telecoils can be very helpful to people with hearing loss. For those who need more help, a revolutionary device and service are now available.

Similar to captioned television, products such as the *Hamilton CapTel* and *CaptionCall* telephones use voice recognition technology to provide written captions of the caller's speech on a large, easy-to-read screen. This free captioning service allows people with hearing loss to use the phone more easily and with greater confidence and independence. It's available for both mobile and landline phones. Landline captioned telephones require a high-speed internet connection, a standard single-line phone connection and an electrical outlet.

There is no monthly charge for the service. Please call our office for more information. You can also learn more, watch a video and even order online at [www.captioncall.com](http://www.captioncall.com) or [www.captel.com](http://www.captel.com).

Sincerely,

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*(from other side)*

## Hearing loss at school

Hearing is critical for developing speech, language and academic skills. Even a mild hearing loss can affect a child's ability to develop language skills and can interfere with learning at all grade levels.

Audiologists stress the need for early identification and early treatment of hearing loss, and tremendous progress has been made. Today, about 90% of babies born in the United States have a hearing screening *before* leaving the hospital.

## Hearing loss at work

Hearing loss in the workplace makes it more difficult to participate in meetings, to use a telephone, or to understand what fellow workers are saying. A nurse has to hear what the patient says and a waiter has to hear the food order. Problems at work, reduced productivity, and even missed promotions

are additional hidden costs.

Undetected hearing loss can cause the greatest problems. The person may confuse names, numbers and dates. Undetected hearing loss can make someone look confused, uncooperative or disinterested, i.e., "*Why don't you pay attention?*"

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***"Undetected hearing loss can make someone look confused, uncooperative or disinterested."***

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## Hearing loss at home

Unacknowledged hearing loss can cause a great deal of stress and friction among family members. A family member may say, "*Why don't you pay attention to what I say anymore?*" A spouse may complain that their husband or wife turns the television up too loud. Adult

children may decide it's just too difficult to communicate with Mom or Dad, and family relationships begin to deteriorate.

The stress and frustration caused by hearing loss can lead to isolation and even divorce. A large study by the National Council on the Aging found that the person with untreated hearing loss is more likely to be socially isolated, feel anxious, and feel depressed than someone who has gotten help.

## The good news

The good news is that a great deal of help is available today. Hearing aids have improved dramatically, and people with significant hearing loss are able to hear and communicate more effectively. The most important step, though, is up to the person with the hearing loss. Until he or she decides to do something about it, the hidden costs of hearing loss will continue to control much of a person's life at school, at work and at home.