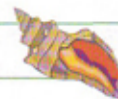


Hillcrest HealthCare News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Summer 2012

Keep your hearing healthy

We encourage you to schedule regular hearing check-ups. That's because it's not unusual to have small changes in hearing, changes you may not be aware of because they happen so gradually, or because only certain sounds are affected.

If we find any change in your hearing test results, a minor "re-tuning" of your hearing aids can result in better hearing for you.

At your hearing check-up, we:

- **Check your ear canals for earwax.** Excessive earwax can interfere with hearing and cause damage to hearing aids.
- **Clean your hearing aids.** Regular cleaning minimizes hearing aid repairs and makes sure that your hearing aids are providing the maximum benefit.
- **Review other sources of help.** This is a good time to talk about telephone amplifiers, clock and smoke alarms, and assistive devices for television, including the new wireless technology.

Your hearing deserves good care! Please call our office to schedule an appointment.

The New York Times on Hearing Loss

The *New York Times* published an important article on the problems caused by untreated hearing loss.

Jane Brody, personal health columnist for the *Times*, described hearing loss as "a hidden disability, often not obvious to others or even to those who have it." She summarized research findings on the negative effects of untreated hearing loss.

Brody described adult hearing loss as "perhaps the nation's most damaging and costly sensory handicap. Its onset is usually insidious, gradually worsening over years and thus easily ignored."

The author summarized the findings of several studies that persons with untreated hearing loss "are likely to become frustrated and socially isolated. That isolation has been linked to depression."

Brody also reported on the connection between untreated hearing loss and brain function, including dementia. A 2011 study at Johns Hopkins Medicine found a direct relationship in a group of subjects with untreated hearing loss:

"For each 10 decibel loss in hearing, the risk of dementia rose about 20 percent."



The serious effects of untreated hearing loss were described in a *New York Times* article.

One possible cause of the increased risk of dementia is the social isolation caused by untreated hearing loss. But there also may be a more direct mechanism:

"When the clarity of words is garbled, the brain has to reallocate resources to hear at the expense of other brain functions. The overworked brain may lose cognitive reserve."

The ability of hearing aids to prevent, minimize, or reverse the negative effects of untreated loss has been well documented. As one researcher put it:

"Hearing aids are very successful treatments for reversing the effects caused by hearing impairment."

More than 75% of adults with significant hearing loss do not seek professional help. Those who do seek help wait an average of seven years longer than they should. For many people, a recommendation from a family member, friend, or personal physician is the major motivating factor.

The article appeared in the *Personal Health* section of the Jan. 17, 2012 issue.

Oh, Those Noisy Restaurants!

A Zagat survey of 15,000 restaurants across the United States found *noise* to be the second most common complaint of restaurant-goers (second only to *poor service*).

In other words, one of the most common complaints of people with perfectly normal hearing is *difficulty hearing in noisy restaurants*.

Along with movies, television shows and the world in general, restaurants have become noisier than ever. The background noise includes loud music, the clatter of silverware and dishes, and even the blaring of televisions sets in the dining area. Another major source of interference is the voices of other diners who talk louder because they can't hear each other!

A University of California study of the noise levels in various types of restaurants (*bar/restaurant, family, elegant*) found average noise levels ranged between 50 and 90

decibels on the "A" scale (normal conversation is around 45-50 decibels). But high noise levels averaged about 110 dB A, well above the level that interferes with speech understanding.



Hearing in a noisy restaurant is difficult for everyone.

The researchers concluded that noise levels in all but the "elegant" restaurant are loud enough to interfere with normal conversation, *even if a person has normal hearing*.

Not surprisingly, the "bar/restaurant" type was the loudest, and seemed designed

to be loud. "Family" restaurants were significantly quieter.

The "elegant" restaurant was by far the quietest setting—about 20 decibels quieter. Patrons of upscale (and more expensive) restaurants receive not only better food and service for their dining dollar, they also get the pleasure of being able to understand their dining companions!

Hear Healthy, Feel Healthy

Hearing aids not only minimize or reverse the effects of untreated hearing loss described by *The New York Times* (see other side), the improved communication provided by hearing aids can also have a positive effect on how you feel about your own health.

A university study asked a group of adults with hearing loss questions about their health and how they felt about their health. Each was then fitted with hearing aids. Six months later, they were asked the questions again.

The results showed that after using hearing aids, there was a significant improvement in how people *felt* about their health, even though their actual health status did not improve.

Healthy Hearing Aids

Moisture can be harmful to your hearing aids and is more of a problem in summer because of humidity, perspiration and air conditioning. We recommend that you use a de-humidifier kit to minimize moisture problems. If you have serious problems with moisture, an electric drying unit can significantly reduce moisture-related repairs.

Sincerely,

The Audiologists, Dispensers and Staff of Hillcrest Hearing Aids & Balance Center

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When the World is Spinning: The Problems of Dizziness

Feelings of *dizziness* or *unsteadiness* are a common health complaint. About 42% of patients will report dizziness to their doctor or audiologist at least once in their lifetime. The frequency of balance disorders increases with age. Balance disorders are one of the most common reasons for seeking medical help for people over 70 years of age.

Dizziness may be related to ear and hearing problems because the balance center—the *vestibular* system—is directly connected to the inner ear. The vestibular system and the inner ear also share the same nerve leading to the brain.

Two common but very different descriptions of a dizziness attack are that *the room is spinning* or there is a *sense of unsteadiness*. These attacks may occur suddenly or when changing position (such as getting out of bed). The episode may last only a few minutes or may be long term. Faintness or nausea may be present. Headaches, muscular aches in the neck and back, and fatigue may also occur.

Types of dizziness.

Vertigo refers to a problem of the vestibular system. The person usually complains of feelings of spinning or turning, rather than

a sense of unsteadiness. Vertigo can be caused by viral infections, medications, head trauma, ear infections or, rarely, tumors.

Dysequilibrium refers to more generalized problems of unsteadiness. These complaints usually are not related to the inner ear, but to problems such as high blood pressure, hyperventilation, or poor blood circulation.

Because there are so many causes, it can be difficult to identify the cause of a balance disorder. The first step is a medical examination. Specialized tests may include audiologic testing and vestibular testing such as *electronystagmography* (ENG). Neurologic, X-ray and balance testing (*posturography*) may also be done.

Treatment.

If a specific cause is found, treatment can be directed at the cause of the balance disorder. In cases where the cause is not determined, medication or a change in diet may be recommended.

A vestibular rehabilitation program may be recommended. This is a series of exercises designed to teach the brain to compensate for the loss of balance function. Many people experience significant reduction in the feelings of unsteadiness or dizziness following therapy.