

Integrated Regional Falls Program



North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN

Hearing Loss and Older Adults

Hearing loss is one of the most common conditions affecting older and elderly adults. Approximately one in three people between the ages of 65 and 74 has hearing loss and nearly half of those older than 75 have difficulty hearing. Hearing loss can make it hard to have conversations with others which can lead to feelings of frustration, embarrassment, and even isolation. In addition, research has demonstrated that people with poor hearing acuity have a higher risk for **falls**. Hearing, in combination with our vision and the orientation of our body in space, plays a critical role in our balance.

Types of Hearing Loss

Sensorineural Hearing Loss - occurs when there is damage to the inner ear or the auditory nerve. This type of hearing loss is permanent.

Conductive Hearing Loss - occurs when sound waves cannot reach the inner ear. The cause may be earwax build-up, fluid, or a punctured eardrum. Medical or surgical treatment can usually restore conductive hearing loss.

Causes of Hearing Loss

- Presbycusis – hearing loss associated with the aging process. This condition affects some people more than others, and seems to run in families.
- Exposure to loud noise - noise-induced hearing loss is associated with occupations such as construction work, farming, aviation work and yard and tree care workers.
- Medical conditions - viral or bacterial infections, heart conditions or stroke, head injuries, and tumors.
- Medications –such as aspirin, NSAIDS, and certain antibiotics.

Warning Signs of Hearing Loss

- Tinnitus described as frequent ringing, hissing, or roaring sound in the ears. Tinnitus can come and go, or it can persist or stop altogether.
- Difficulty hearing on the telephone.
- Difficulty hearing when there is noise in the background.
- Difficulty following a conversation when two or more people talk at the same time.
- Straining to understand a conversation.
- People seem to mumble or not speak clearly.
- Misunderstanding what others are saying and respond inappropriately.
- Asking people to repeat themselves.
- People complaining that your TV volume up too high.



What do I do if I Think I Have Hearing Loss?

Hearing problems can be serious; if you think you have a hearing problem seek professional advice. You can start with your family physician, or you can see a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating diseases of the ear, nose, and throat. Audiologists have specialized training in identifying and measuring the type and degree of hearing loss and recommending treatment options and may be licensed to fit hearing aids. Hearing aid specialists, who are licensed to conduct and evaluate basic hearing tests, can offer counselling, and fit and test hearing aids.

Options for Treatment

Treatment will depend on the type of hearing loss; some treatments will work better for you than others. There are a number of devices and aids that can improve hearing loss.

- Hearing aids - are electronic instruments you wear in or behind your ear and they make sounds louder. There are three basic styles of hearing aids. The styles differ by size, their placement on or inside the ear, and the degree to which they amplify sound.



Behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids consist of a hard plastic case worn behind the ear and connected to a plastic earmold that fits inside the outer ear. Sound travels from the hearing aid through the earmold and into the ear. BTE aids are used by people of all ages for mild to profound hearing loss. A new kind of BTE aid is small, fits behind the ear completely, with only a narrow tube inserted into the ear canal, enabling the canal to remain open. Some people prefer the newer BTE hearing aid because their perception of their voice does not sound “plugged up.”

In-the-ear (ITE) hearing aids fit completely inside the outer ear and are used for mild to severe hearing loss. Some ITE aids may have certain added features installed, such as a telecoil. A telecoil is a small magnetic coil that allows users to receive sound through the circuitry of the hearing aid, rather than through its microphone. This makes it easier to hear conversations over the telephone. A telecoil also helps people hear in public facilities that have installed special sound systems, called induction loop systems. Induction loop systems can be found in many churches, schools, airports, and auditoriums.

Canal aids fit into the ear canal and are used for mild to moderately severe hearing loss. Because they are small, canal aids may be difficult for a person to adjust and remove. In addition, canal aids have less space available for batteries and additional devices, such as a telecoil. They usually are not recommended for people with severe to profound hearing loss because their reduced size limits their power and volume.

- Cochlear implants - are small electronic devices surgically implanted in the inner ear that help provide a sense of sound to people who are profoundly deaf or hard-of-hearing. If your hearing loss is severe, your doctor may recommend a cochlear implant in one ear or both.
- Assistive listening devices - include telephone amplifying devices, smart phone or tablet "apps," and closed circuit systems (induction coil loops) in places of worship, theatres, and auditoriums.
- Lip reading - is another option that helps people with hearing problems follow conversational speech. People who use this method pay close attention to others when they talk, by watching how the speaker's mouth and body move.

Other Tips for People with Hearing Loss

- Tell your friends and family about your hearing loss. If they know hearing is hard for you, the more they can help.
- Ask your friends and family to face you when they talk so that you can see their faces, it may help you to understand them better.
- Ask people to speak louder and more clearly.
- Turn off the TV or the radio if you aren't actively listening to it.
- Be aware of noise around you that can make hearing more difficult. Background noise makes it hard to hear people talk.

References

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