

A Sound Investment in Better Health

By The Audiology Department at Advanced Healthcare

Imagine for a moment, that you must strain to hear the sound of your grandchild saying “I love you.” Imagine that you must turn up the TV volume so high that your family won’t even stay in the room with you. Imagine that the laughter and camaraderie of your bridge club becomes a distant memory as you avoid get-togethers where background noise makes it too difficult to hear the fun.

For nearly 29 million Americans, these scenarios are reality. One out of ten people in our country have some degree of hearing loss. With the aging of the baby boomer population and the increased noise of our industrialized society, this number is expected to increase by leaps and bounds. Some types of hearing loss can be medically reversed, but the reality is that 90% of hearing loss is permanent. So what can be done to help people with permanent hearing loss? Modern technology has provided a plentiful variety of hearing help, including hearing aids and assistive listening devices. Hearing aids are the only viable treatment for permanent hearing loss and have been found to be effective in 95% of these cases. Ironically, hearing-impaired people have been reluctant to seek out the help they deserve. It is surprising to note that as many as 70% of people who could benefit from hearing aids don’t use them!

Why do you suppose this is? It appears that social stigma prevents many people from seeking hearing help through amplification. The prevailing attitude is that “hearing aids will make me seem old.” While it’s true that hearing loss occurs more frequently in people over 60 — it’s as common as 1 out of every 3 people in this age group — you might consider this concept: Untreated hearing loss is more conspicuous to the outside world than any



Audiologists shown left to right: Maria Merrill, Karen Goetz, Katie Tobin, Anna Wroblewski and Sheila Chamberlin

hearing aid. It’s true! It’s common for people with hearing loss to “smile and nod along” when they don’t hear parts of the conversation. Or worse yet, hearing loss may cause an individual to hear something incorrectly and respond in an inappropriate manner, such as laughing at a serious moment, which can result in all kinds of embarrassing situations!

The point to be made here is that hearing aid use should symbolize a proactive response to a health issue. You have hearing trouble and you have done something about it! Rather than making you appear “old,” it appears as though you are taking control of your life by improving communication.

There have been some rather impressive medical studies done in the past decade that have taken a long, hard look at the lasting effects of untreated hearing loss. These studies have been able to quantify what family members of individuals with hearing loss have observed and reported for years. That is, people with untreated hearing loss exhibit significantly higher incidence of isolation, depression, anxiety, social phobia, anger, and frustration. Hearing loss results in breakdown of communication, which negatively impacts human contact and interaction.

Think about it — if Mom can’t hear the conversation, Mom can’t be a part of the conversation. So, on those all- too- rare occasions where the whole family gets together for the holidays, Mom misses out on a large part of the reminiscing, joking and laughter that characterizes these get-togethers. What an important part of life she is missing! Studies have further shown that related to the negative impact on quality of life that accompanies hearing loss, comes a higher prevalence of poor health issues like high blood pressure, headache, and body pain. Now,

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if you had a health problem like *(Continued)* body pain, wouldn't you seek out some form of treatment to make it better? Why live with pain if you don't have to? Well, the same is true for hearing loss!

There *is* good news to report. Recent studies show that treatment through hearing aid use is directly associated with improvements in these psycho-social symptoms of hearing loss. In a study of over 2000 hearing-impaired people and more than 1,700 family members, strong evidence indicated the value of hearing aid use in improvement of some of the following quality of life issues:

- Greater earning power
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Improved cognitive functioning
- Improved health status and less incidence of body pain

(National Council on Aging, 1999)

Computer technology has been one of the greatest advances of current times. It's amazing what is available to us with digital communication, digital cameras, digital music recording, and digital video! It seems the possibilities are endless! Digital technology has made a world of difference in hearing aid technology as well. Digital hearing aids bring sound clarity and comfort to hearing loss as never before. Digital hearing aids provide a variety of options to hearing aid users resulting in simplicity of use and management of noisy listening environments. Use of digital sound processing has opened the doors for many hearing problems that couldn't be helped by the limitations of "old" technology. And more importantly, digital hearing aid technology has become affordable to everyone.

Based on what we now know about the negative impacts of untreated hearing loss, it seems that not investing in hearing help may be a mistake you can't afford to make!

For more information, call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080, or log onto www.ah.com.

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Hearing services available at these Advanced Healthcare clinics:

- Cedar Creek Clinic
(215 W. Washington St., Grafton, 262-375-3700)
- Good Hope Clinic
(3003 W. Good Hope Rd., Milwaukee, 414-352-3100)
- Menomonee Falls Clinic
(N84 W16889 Menomonee Ave., Menomonee Falls, 262-251-7500)