

The Surprising Effects of Untreated Hearing Loss

Reduced hearing acuity is frustrating for people with hearing loss as well as for those around them. In fact, a 2009 study showed that relationships are failing because of unmanaged hearing loss. The survey of 1,500 hearing-impaired people over 55 revealed that almost half (44 percent of people) said that relationships with their partner, friends or family have suffered because they can't hear properly.

Hearing loss isn't just an ear issue; it's a quality of life and health issue. Untreated hearing loss can have serious consequences. A decrease in hearing sensitivity is associated with diminished cognitive function, poorer mental health, and social withdrawal. A nationwide survey of 4,000 adults with hearing loss compiled by the National Council on Aging (Kochkin & Rogin, 2000) found significantly higher rates of psychosocial disorders including depression and anxiety in individuals with untreated hearing loss -- those who were not wearing hearing aids.

A separate study at Johns Hopkins found that cognitive diminishment was 41 percent greater in seniors with hearing loss. The study identified a link between the degree of hearing loss and the risk of developing dementia. Individuals with mild hearing loss were twice as likely to develop dementia, those with moderate hearing loss were three times as likely, and those with severe hearing loss were five times as likely to develop dementia when compared to individuals with normal hearing.

Researchers and hearing care professionals have long understood the link between cognition and hearing acuity. When you are listening to someone speak your brain is processing the sound so that you can understand it. A listener with untreated hearing loss is trying to understand degraded speech signals therefore their brain has to work harder to process those sounds. While your brain is busy working to understand incoming speech signals other tasks like memory and comprehension can suffer.

Fortunately, hearing loss is treatable. According to the Better Hearing Institute, 95 percent of Americans with hearing loss can be treated with hearing aids and individuals who treat their hearing loss early have shown significant benefit. Hearing aids help process incoming sound making it easier for your brain to understand them. Other benefits of hearing aids include reduced mental fatigue, decreased feelings of social isolation and depression, improved ability to do several things at once, improved memory, attention and focus, as well as improved communication skills.

Although hearing loss is treatable, just 28.5 percent of hearing impaired Americans use hearing aids. There are many reasons for that statistic, among them is financial difficulty. We often have people come in for a hearing test, find out they need hearing instruments, but leave without purchasing because they cannot afford them.

Comprehensive Ear & Hearing would like to help people hear their best regardless of finances. In this spirit, Comprehensive Ear & Hearing will again partner with the Holland Free Health Clinic, Love Inc. and Fourpointes to give the gift of hearing to many in our community with hearing health care and financial needs in March 2016. Thanks to a generous donation from the Dettter Foundation and our partnership with the Starkey Hear Now Foundation we will be able to do our 2nd annual hearing mission.

If you have a patient who you suspect needs hearing aids, but is in a difficult financial situation, please have them stop by any of our offices to pick up an application for this mission.

To learn more about our West Michigan Hearing Mission or the Hear Now Foundation, visit www.CompEarHear.com.

"Alone we can't do much, but together we can change the world." Bill Austin, Founder of the Starkey Hearing Foundation.



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We have three locations to better serve you!

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- Medical ear & hearing care and wax removal by ENT
- Medicare and most insurance accepted
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Office Hours

Monday - Friday 8:30 am - 5:00 pm
After hours appointments available by request.



Terry DeGroot, M.D.

Dr. Terry DeGroot is available at all three Comprehensive Ear & Hearing locations for medical ear & hearing care including cerumen management.

If you have a patient with any of the following symptoms an appointment with Dr. DeGroot is recommended:

- Sudden hearing loss or noticeable change in hearing
- Ringing in the ears
- History of ear wax accumulation