

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARING CARE IN THE WORK PLACE

By Kristin Johnston & Carli Van Harken
 Owners of Comprehensive Ear & Hearing

There are endless stories about the millennial generation and its effect on the workplace, but employers are probably noticing the effect of another generation: baby boomers.

As baby boomers age and stay active, the nation's workforce is aging with them. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that by 2022, nearly a third of people ages 65 to 74 will still be working—that's up from 20 percent in 2002 and 27 percent in 2012.

With that growth likely comes a growing number of employees suffering from hearing loss, whether it's diagnosed or not. The Hearing Loss Association of America notes that from the ages of 20 to 64 one out of six people has a hearing loss and at age 65, one out of three people has a hearing loss. Here are four things employers need to know:

One: Hearing loss is a federally protected disability

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities, and hearing impairment falls under that protection.

A U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission publication warns employers against making decisions based on "stereotypical assumptions about hearing loss."

"Some employers assume incorrectly that workers with hearing impairments will cause safety hazards, increase employment costs, or have difficulty communicating in fast-paced environments," the publication reads.

Two: Left untreated, hearing loss can cause problems for the employee, possibly affecting job performance.

Untreated hearing loss can lead to myriad other health problems and affect personal relationships, but it also can affect job performance.

People who can't hear well find it difficult to capture details in large group meetings, conference calls or even one-on-one conversations. Embarrassment may make the employee reluctant to engage in meetings or ask people to repeat themselves, so key details could be missed.

Three: When diagnosed and treated, it's a benefit to the

employee and therefore the company.

According to a study by the Better Hearing Institute (BHI), almost 7 out of 10 study participants said they could communicate more effectively in their job when they wore hearing aids, including meetings and one-on-one conversations.

Treating hearing loss also bodes well for the personal advancement of the employee. Management respects a person who faces challenges head on. The BHI study revealed that people with untreated hearing impairment lost as much as \$30,000 in annual income.

Four: It comes on gradually, so regular testing is important

People with hearing loss are often the last to notice it. Unlike a cold, symptoms are not sudden and don't come with visible evidence.

It's important that people learn to look for the signs, such as often asking others to repeat themselves, realizing you prefer the radio or television at a higher volume than those around you, or having difficulty with high frequency sounds, such as the voices of women or children.

Employers can help combat work issues related to hearing loss by promoting regular testing and other hearing health benefits.

Medical plans do not typically fully cover hearing care, but the Comprehensive Ear & Hearing Benefits Plan can serve as an ancillary program.

It costs nothing to participate while offering access to a staff of hearing professionals, free hearing tests, substantial savings on hearing aids, guaranteed trial periods and more. Hearing aids also are eligible expenses for health savings accounts (HSAs) and flexible savings accounts (FSAs).

We also encourage employers to integrate education about the importance of hearing care into their existing wellness efforts, such as newsletters and health fairs. Content for education is available free from Comprehensive Ear & Hearing, and our professionals are available to visit worksites to provide presentations and offer complimentary hearing screens.

Employees and Family Members Receive

- FREE hearing screens
- FREE hearing instrument demonstrations and trial use
- \$500 OFF a pair of digital hearing instruments
- FREE clean & checks on current hearing instruments
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Hearing Benefits Card

The Comprehensive Ear & Hearing Benefits Plan is available to all members of the Chamber of Commerce in Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties. If you'd like more information on the Comprehensive Ear & Hearing Business Benefits Program or to receive benefits cards for your employees, call Deb Broemer at 616.847.3144.

ONE IN THREE AMERICANS
IN THE WORK FORCE
 HAS UNTREATED HEARING LOSS...

More than **10 percent** of full time employees have a **diagnosed hearing problem** and another **30 percent suspect they have a problem** but have not sought treatment.

Of those with suspected hearing loss, nearly all report that this hearing loss impacts them on the job, with complaints ranging from misunderstanding what is being said to pretending to hear when they cannot and having trouble on the phone.

Hearing is an important part of everyday lives -- keeping us informed, safe and connected. Good communication is critical to business success for both employer and employee.

...WITH NUMEROUS
NEGATIVE
 EFFECTS

Many people put off getting help for their hearing loss because they think it's insignificant — something they can deal with by simply turning the TV louder or asking friends to repeat themselves. But research has linked untreated hearing loss to significant issues such as:

- Irritability, negativism and anger
- Fatigue, tension, stress and depression
- Avoidance or withdrawal from social situations
- Social rejection and loneliness
- Reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety
- Impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks
- Reduced job performance and earning power
- Diminished psychological and overall health

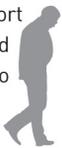
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Adults with untreated hearing loss were more likely to report depression, anxiety and paranoia than peers who wore hearing aids.⁴



Over 360 million of the world's population have disabling hearing loss.⁵

*50 years and older



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Office Hours

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

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