

Over 36 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. Hearing loss can be caused by exposure to loud noises, genetics, aging, infection, or exposure to certain medication. Most hearing loss is permanent although some can be treated medically with antibiotics or surgery.

As an audiologist, I see people with varying degrees of hearing loss, from mild to profound. These individuals have extremely different lifestyles; Homebodies, retirees, teachers, lawyers, doctors, moms, students, friends. Hearing loss crosses all gender and socioeconomic borders. A person suffering from hearing loss could be attending an Elder football game with you at The Pit. They could be your server at Price Hill Chili. They could be sitting right next to you as you read this article. However, one commonality exists between all of these individuals. When asked how their hearing loss affects them, a frequent answer is “I can’t understand what is being said and that is very frustrating.”

Annual physicals, vision screenings, and bloodwork are scheduled like clockwork for many people. So why don’t people have their hearing checked on a regular basis? For years hearing loss has been treated like a minor problem. Research shows that if hearing loss is left untreated, earning

power is reduced, disruptions in family life occur and psychological problems can be caused including depression due to a feeling of isolation.

So, what is your first step if you suspect yourself or a loved one has hearing loss? Schedule an appointment with an audiologist and have your hearing checked. An audiologist is a university trained professional, holding a Masters or Doctoral degree, trained in identifying, diagnosing, and treating hearing loss and balance disorders. If you are unsure where to locate an audiologist, go to www.audiology.org for a complete list of audiologists in your area.

If a diagnosis of hearing loss is found and hearing aids are recommended, get hearing aids. Hearing aid technology has been revolutionized over the past few years. Today's digital hearing aids are far superior to anything that was available five or six years ago. Have your audiologist explain all of your options and ask questions. The more involved a patient becomes with their hearing aid journey, the more successful hearing aid wearers they become.

Finally, even if you do not suspect you have a hearing loss, protect yourself when around loud noises. Wear foam earplugs or earmuffs when cutting grass or using power tools. Also, mark your calendar and have

your hearing checked on a regular basis. Sometimes hearing loss can sneak up on you so it's best to have your hearing checked annually.

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