

The facts about hearing loss:

- 48 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss.
- 2-3 out of every 1,000 children in the US are born with detectable levels of hearing loss.
- Half of all blast induced injuries obtained in the Army result in permanent hearing loss for veterans.
- 50 million Americans experience tinnitus (ringing in the ears); 90% of those also have hearing loss
- 12.5% of children ages 6-19 have hearing loss as a result of listening to loud music, especially if listening through earbuds at unsafe levels.
- Baby boomers have the largest degree of hearing loss due to our listening to loud live music from the 60's forward.

Hearing loss at any degree negatively impacts nearly every part of the human experience, including physical health, emotional and mental health, social skills, family relationships, work performance and especially self-esteem. So why is it that we don't take hearing loss seriously? What is it about hearing loss that makes us go into complete denial or believe it to be an "old age" problem? Even worse, why do hearing people have little patience in understanding hearing loss, even when it includes members of our own family?

Let me first begin by speaking to the hearing readers. Please, stop yelling what you are trying to convey. Stop repeating the same exact words to the hearing-challenged individual, when they ask for repeats. Stop exaggerating your mouth movements, and please stop covering your mouth when speaking or speaking from another room. Here's why: We have all created our own survival skills and covering your mouth just makes it more difficult to read your face and hear the words. There are some sounds we hear better than others. Not all words are created equal. They are made up of different frequencies that, when said

loudly, become all jumbled.

How many times have you heard someone say "I can hear you but I can't understand what you're saying?" It's because our speech discrimination may be poor. Wearing hearing aids or a cochlear implant doesn't mean we have 100% hearing. Read that again: *Hearing aids do NOT necessarily give us 100% hearing.* However, it does help us stay connected to life and that needs to be respected.

If I ask you to repeat and I still don't get it after the second try, please rephrase. Most of the time the hearing-challenged person cannot get what you're saying because he or she doesn't have a clue what the topic is. Consider presenting the topic first. For example, start with "Dinner (pause), remember the dinner we went to ..." rather than saying, "Remember last week we went to that dinner and blah blah ..." You give the main topic you are speaking about first so that the individual can process what is being discussed.

You won't hear this too often but hearing aids are not for everyone and not everyone can benefit. The only way to know if you or your loved one will benefit from a hearing aid is to first see an otolaryngologist (also known as ear, nose, and throat specialist or ENT) to make sure no other medical issues are present. An ENT may send you to an audiologist to test your hearing. If so, make certain to take a copy of your audiogram. Do NOT jump into buying hearing aids right then and there. Hearing aids are a business and prices vary. I will be discussing what you need to know about hearing aids in a Zoom presentation on June 19. Until then, remember: hearing aids are not a sign we are getting old; they mean we are staying connected.

Join Pearl on Friday, June 19 at 10:30am via zoom . To join the presentation, go to www.SOMATwoTownsforAllAges.org and click on the calendar of events on June 19.

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