



Hearing Loss

Understanding hearing loss, its effects and available solutions.



chime

The National Charity for
Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing loss
is a very
common
health
condition
in adults
but it is often
unrecognised
and untreated.



Introduction

Hearing loss is a very common health condition in adults, but it is often unrecognised and untreated. As we get older, many of us can develop a hearing loss. In fact research shows that more than 30% of people over 60 years of age in Ireland have a significant hearing loss but less than half of them have taken any action to address their hearing loss, resulting in major risks to their health and quality of life.

The effects of hearing loss are often life-changing and can:

- ▶ Affect your self-confidence
- ▶ Impact on your social life
- ▶ Affect your ability to communicate with others
- ▶ Have an impact on your employment and promotional prospects
- ▶ Result in increased isolation from family and friends

Research has shown that people with an acquired hearing loss are more likely to be socially isolated and less independent. They are also more likely to be at risk of developing symptoms of depression or dementia.



Understanding Hearing Loss

From the moment we wake up in the morning to the time we go to sleep at night, sound and communication play a central role in our lives. Communication keeps us socially connected to family, friends, work colleagues and society.

But, especially as we get older, many of us begin to experience hearing problems which can impact on our communication with others. At Chime, we have many years of experience supporting people who are socially isolated due to deafness and hearing loss.

We know that the key problem arising for people who acquire a hearing loss is the impact on communication and the loss of social connectivity.



How We Hear

The ear is made up of three different sections: the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear. These parts work together so we can hear and process sounds. The outer ear, or pinna (the part you can see), picks up sound waves that then travel down the ear canal.

When the sound waves hit the eardrum, the eardrum starts to vibrate. When the eardrum vibrates, it then causes three tiny bones in the middle ear to vibrate. These bones are called the ossicles (hammer, anvil and stirrup). They conduct sound through the middle and into the inner ear.

The vibrations then travel to the cochlea, which is filled with liquid and has thousands of tiny hairs. The sound vibrations make the tiny hairs move. The function of the hairs is to change the sound waves into electrical impulses that then travel along the auditory nerve to the brain. When the electrical impulses reach the brain, the sound is heard.

Levels of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is often classified by means of different levels. The same definitions are not always used, but the following are among the most common.

Mild

On average, the quietest sounds that people can hear with their better ear are between 25 and 40dB. People who suffer from mild hearing loss have some difficulties keeping up with conversations, especially in noisy surroundings.

Moderate

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are between 40 and 70dB. People who suffer from moderate hearing loss have difficulty keeping up with conversations when not using a hearing aid.

Severe

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are between 70 and 95dB. People who suffer from severe hearing loss will benefit from powerful hearing aids, but often they rely heavily on lip-reading even when they are using hearing aids. Some also use sign language.

Profound

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are from 95dB or more. People who suffer from profound hearing loss are very hard of hearing and rely mostly on lip-reading, and/or sign language. They may hear loud sounds.

Recognising Hearing Loss

Sometimes it is the partner or loved one of a person with hearing loss who may first become aware of the problem. This can be due to the fact that the onset of hearing loss is a gradual thing and the person affected doesn't realise the problem. Often it can be due to denial of the situation by the person with the hearing loss.

You may find that your loved one:

- ▶ Needs a lot of the conversation repeated several times
- ▶ Misunderstands what is being said
- ▶ Complains that you are not speaking clearly or loudly enough
- ▶ Does not hear the doorbell or the telephone ring
- ▶ Dislikes going to parties, pubs or other noisy environments
- ▶ Turns the television up too loud for your comfort

If you are at all concerned about your partner's hearing, encourage him or her to get it checked by a professional. Gradual hearing loss is likely to be age-related but can sometimes be associated with other health problems. Your GP will be able to check your partner for any infections or obstructions which might account for the hearing loss, and they can refer your partner to a specialist. If your partner is over 60 and has no history of hearing complications, the GP can refer them directly to their nearest Chime resource centre or audiology department in the local hospital for a free hearing test and hearing aid assessment without having to see an ENT (ear, nose and throat) consultant.

Your partner shouldn't wait between the onset of hearing loss and seeking medical advice. It's better to find out about and start wearing hearing aids sooner rather than later, as getting used to amplified sound is harder if the person has already got used to a 'quieter' world.

Available Solutions

Hearing aids and other assistive technology improve the social participation and health of people with hearing loss. The fitting of hearing aids has been shown to improve relationships and increase levels of happiness. Unfortunately statistics show that people wait an average of 10 years between acquiring a hearing loss and finally getting help. Research also shows that the earlier you take action, the easier it is to adjust to wearing hearing aids. If you have a hearing loss, taking action now is likely to improve your quality of life and make you happier!



Effects of Hearing Loss

Even a slight hearing loss can have a negative impact on the ability to work, socialise and enjoy life. Research on people with hearing loss and their families and friends has shown that hearing plays a significant factor in a person's social, emotional and physical well-being. Hearing loss in older age has been associated with increased risks of developing depression, dementia, heart problems and diabetes.

Early detection and treatment of hearing loss is critical to reduce the chances of developing these problems. Research has shown that people who have their hearing loss diagnosed and are fitted with hearing aids are significantly happier, are more socially active, and are physically healthier than those with untreated hearing loss.

One large American study found that hearing loss had the second highest negative impact on individuals' quality of life in terms of physical and cognitive functioning: higher than cancer, heart disease, arthritis, epilepsy, diabetes, blindness and a range of other health conditions. Only chronic digestive disorders had a greater impact on quality of life than hearing loss, and these disorders are similar to hearing loss in that they impact on daily living on an almost constant basis. (Hawkins et al, 2012).

Many people suffer unnecessarily with their hearing difficulties. They may have difficulty facing the fact that they have some hearing loss and they are not sure of what steps to take to tackle the problem. Fortunately, in many cases, treatment of hearing loss can be easily resolved.

Over time, reduced stimulation to the ears and brain can actually impair the brain's ability to process sound and recognise speech. Once speech recognition deteriorates, it may only partially recoverable with hearing aids in place. Early intervention prevents your brain from forgetting what to do when it receives sound signals. The most common type of intervention is to begin to wear hearing aids.

Do you think you have hearing loss?

	Y	N
Do you think you have hearing loss?		
Do you have difficulty understanding conversation in a busy restaurant or supermarket?		
Do people tell you that you have turned the TV or radio up too loud?		
Do you find it difficult to have conversations on the telephone?		
Do your family or friends complain that you are not hearing them clearly?		
Do you sometimes miss the sound of your doorbell or telephone ringing?		
Do you often have to ask people to repeat what they have said?		
Do you avoid going to social events where it is more difficult to follow conversations?		
Do you sometimes feel that people are mumbling and not speaking clearly?		
Do you find it difficult to understand the voices of females and children?		
Do you have problems following conversations at a meeting?		

If you answered **yes to more than three of these questions**, we recommend that you get your hearing checked!

Book your free hearing test with one of our professional and friendly audiologists in your nearest Chime resource centre.

Information Helpline:



If you have hearing loss or know someone who does call our information helpline on **1800 256 257**

Chime

35 N. Frederick Street
Dublin 1, Ireland

E info@chime.ie

T +353 (0)1 817 5700

F +353 (0)1 872 3816

chime.ie