
HEARING PROBLEMS RISE WITH

We like to assume that when we speak to someone, they will hear exactly what we say. However, this could be a poor assumption when speaking to many seniors. That's because approximately 33% of Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have hearing problems. In addition, this number rises to 50% for those 85 and up.

Many seniors do not realize they have a hearing problem because it comes on gradually. So often it's up to family and friends to notice that a problem exists and to encourage the senior to get help. Here is a list of red flags that may signal a problem.

- ◆ Complain about annoying or loud sounds.
- ◆ Are suspicious of people who "mumble" on purpose.
- ◆ Seem to get less enjoyment from TV shows, concerts or parties.
- ◆ Mention a ringing or hissing in their ears.
- ◆ Give inappropriate answers.
- ◆ Seem uncooperative or confused.
- ◆ Stop trying to communicate and become withdrawn.



If you are having trouble hearing, a good first step is to see your family doctor. If they detect a problem that requires specialized expertise, they may recommend an otolaryngologist or an audiologist.

TYPES OF HEARING LOSS THAT AFFECT SENIORS

- ◆ **Presbycusis** – the gradual loss of hearing linked to changes in the inner ear. Sounds seem muffled, higher tones in particular. Words are difficult to understand, especially against background noise. This is the most common hearing problem for seniors.
- ◆ **Conductive Hearing Loss** – the blocking of sound waves as they pass from the ear drum to the inner ear. Outside sound is muffled. The most common cause is ear wax. Other causes are a perforated ear drum, ear infections and damage to the small bones in the inner ear.
- ◆ **Sensoreural Hearing Loss** – damage to parts of the inner ear or auditory nerve. It can be caused by birth defects, tumors, certain prescription drugs, head injury, illness, high blood pressure, poor circulation or stroke.
- ◆ **Central Deafness** – sounds can be heard, but language cannot be understood. Not as common in seniors, the deafness is permanent (speech therapy can help communication). This illness is due to a problem within the hearing centers in the brain. It may follow a long illness or be caused by head injury, stroke, long exposure to loud noise, tumors or the use of certain drugs.
- ◆ **Tinnitus** – a symptom associated with a variety of diseases, it is a ringing (or other sounds) in the ear. Common in seniors, it can come and go or even stop completely. It may be caused by ear wax, the use of too much aspirin or antibiotics, an ear infection or a nerve disorder.

(Source: NIDCD)

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