**Changing Mindsets: Learn the Facts About Hearing Loss This *World Hearing Day***

*March 3rd Marks Global Day of Awareness*

**March 3 is *World Hearing Day,***an important observance by the World Health Organization (WHO). This is an opportunity to raise awareness about how to prevent deafness and hearing loss—and promote ear and hearing care around the world.

In the United States, **48 million people have some degree of hearing loss.** Globally, more than 1.5 billion people—approximately 20% of the world’s population—are deaf or hard of hearing. Yet, despite the prevalence of hearing loss, persistent myths keep people from seeking help.

Among U.S. adults aged 70 and older with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids, **fewer than one in three (30%) has ever used them.** Even fewer adults aged 20–69 (approximately 16%) who could benefit from wearing hearing aids have ever used them.

If there’s any doubt about the potential benefits of hearing aids, a [new study](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/03/health/hearing-aids-longevity-wellness/index.html) finds one of the most powerful ones: U.S. adults with hearing loss who wear hearing aids consistently have a **significantly lower risk of dying** earlier than those who never wear them.

The theme for *World Hearing Day* this year is [***Changing Mindset*s**](https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hearing-day/2024)*,* a nod to dispelling the many myths that exist around hearing loss. Some leading ones are included below, countered by facts from the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](http://www.asha.org/public) (ASHA). People can share these facts with loved ones, friends, co-workers, and communities in the interest of cultivating accurate and healthier mindsets toward hearing.

**Myth 1: Hearing loss is harmless.**

**FACT: Left unaddressed, hearing difficulties can negatively affect all areas of a person’s life.**

**Children:** Without appropriate intervention, hearing loss can prevent or delay a child’s speech and language development, hinder their academic success, and negatively affect their social skills, friendships, and behavior.

**Adults:** In adults, unaddressed hearing loss can lead to a poorer quality of life marked by challenges in areas such as physical and mental health, personal relationships, career growth and earning potential, and cognitive abilities as one ages (including a possible increased risk of dementia for some groups).

**Myth 2: You can’t prevent hearing loss.**

**FACT: Many causes of hearing loss are preventable.**

Certain forms of hearing loss can be prevented in both children and adults.

In children, hearing loss associated with measles, mumps, rubella, and meningitis can be prevented through vaccination. Expectant mothers can lower their exposure to infectious diseases known to cause hearing loss, such as cytomegalovirus (CMV), by practicing [CMV prevention and healthy pregnancy tips](https://www.nationalcmv.org/overview/prevention-tips). Staying up to date on vaccinations (both mothers and children), avoiding smoking and drugs during pregnancy, and practicing healthy habits during pregnancy all reduce the risks of childhood hearing loss.

Noise-induced hearing loss, caused by exposure to loud noise, is common in both children and adults. Unfortunately, the number of people impacted by this type of hearing loss is steadily increasing.

Noise-induced hearing loss can result from a one-time exposure to loud noise or from repeated behavior. It can occur in a leisure or work setting. Recreational activities that can lead to hearing loss include attending noisy events (such as concerts or sporting events, a fireworks show, or a spin class) as well as listening to personal entertainment devices for too long at loud volumes (especially when using earbuds, headphones, or gaming headsets).

Occupations that put people at risk for hearing loss without adequate protection include factory workers, police officers, baristas, and musicians). Luckily, noise-induced hearing loss is also preventable by limiting the amount of time spent in noisy environments, wearing earplugs (ear muffs are recommended for young children) in loud places, keeping the volume to half or less on personal technology (especially when wearing earbuds, headphones, or gaming headsets), and by taking listening breaks regularly when using technology or while in noisy places.

**Myth 3: Hearing aids don’t work well—or won’t work for me.**

**FACT: Many people have outdated perceptions of hearing aids that prevent them from trying or using them.**

Today’s hearing aids bear almost no resemblance to the large, clunky devices of the past. Not only are many hearing aids nearly invisible, but they also have vastly superior functionality. They don’t just amplify sounds: Most are “smart” enough to isolate and amplify speech while also reducing background noise, allowing people to hear conversations even in noisy settings.

Hearing aids also pair with smartphones and classroom technologies, integrating seamlessly into a person’s daily life. They vary widely in cost and functionality. Audiologists can advise patients on which hearing aids would work best for them based on their lifestyle.

The goal of hearing aids is not just to hear sounds at a louder volume: It is to help people communicate effectively.

When a person has trouble understanding others, they may withdraw from social situations and become isolated. When a person has trouble communicating, they may feel the need to retire early from their job or stop enjoying activities that brought them joy. Such withdrawal can damage a person’s physical and mental health. Healthy ears help us orient to the environment, assisting us with balance cues—an important function for older adults who struggle to recover from falls.

**Myth 4: Hearing aids are the only way to address hearing loss.**

**FACT: A variety of approaches allow people who are deaf or hard of hearing to achieve effective communication.**

Hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other hearing assistive technologies are not the only way to address hearing loss, although these are highly effective options.Intervention is not one-size-fits-all solution, and approaches differ depending on a family’s and an individual’s preferences, needs, and culture. People who are deaf or hard of hearing can communicate through listening and spoken language, a visual sign language, and/or a combination of both. They can also use augmentative and alternative communication methods such as picture communication boards or speech-generating devices. Audiologists and speech-language pathologists work with clients, patients, and students—and their families—to support effective communication.

**The Bottom Line**

The more people know about ear care and hearing loss, the better off they’ll be. So share the facts this *World Hearing Day.* [Find resources and learn more](https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hearing-day/2024) about this important day of global observance from the WHO.

**Access More Resources From ASHA**

You can get more information about hearing loss and hearing protection—and locate a certified audiologist near you—at [www.asha.org/public](http://www.asha.org/public).

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