**Prioritize Ear and Hearing Care This *World Hearing Day***

*March 3rd Marks International Day of Awareness*

Approximately 48 million people in the United States have some degree of hearing loss. Some were born deaf and hard of hearing, while others developed hearing loss later in childhood or as an adult. Regardless of the cause, intervention for hearing loss can offer life-changing benefits to people of every age.

**Though Common, Hearing Loss Is Often Unaddressed**

About 2–3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears. Among school-aged children 6–19 years of age, almost 15% have hearing loss. In adults, hearing loss is among the most common chronic health conditions—more common than diabetes or cancer.

Yet, hearing loss remains under-recognized and under-appreciated—which may explain why it is often ignored. According to the Hearing Loss Association of America, people with hearing loss wait an average of 7 years before they seek help.

**2023 Day of Awareness**

*World Hearing Day* is a great opportunity to bring about needed change. This year, the theme of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) observance is *Ear and hearing care for all!* That call is particularly important when one considers thathearing loss is often preventable through individual and public health measures. Moreover, hearing loss—which can significantly affect a person’s daily life—can be addressed through a variety of approaches.

Without appropriate intervention, hearing loss can negatively affect a child’s speech and language development, academic success, and social and behavioral skills. 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 cognitive abilities as one ages (including earlier onset of dementia).

**Preventing Hearing Loss**

We live in a noisy world. One way everyone can prevent hearing loss is to protect themselves from exposure to excessively loud noise. WHO reports that more than 1 billion people ages 12–35 years worldwide are at risk of hearing loss due to loud noise from personal technology devices or entertainment venues (e.g., concerts, clubs). Other daily sources of loud noise: gyms and fitness classes, sporting events, and restaurants and coffee shops. Also, some people have jobs that routinely expose them to loud noise. Others engage in loud hobbies such as playing an instrument, riding all-terrain vehicles, or woodworking.

In all cases, wearing hearing protection (earmuffs for children and earplugs for adults) is an effective way to prevent lasting damage. People should take listening breaks when they are in a noisy environment or when using earbuds or headphones (ideally, once an hour for a few minutes). Devices should also be kept to half volume or softer.

***Identify the Signs*—and Take Action**

Signs of hearing loss can be subtle. According to the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](http://www.asha.org/) (ASHA), indicators in children include pulling or scratching at their ears, not following directions or responding to their name, and experiencing academic problems that aren’t explained by another issue. In adults, these indicators include ringing, buzzing, or pain in the ear; difficulty following a conversation when more than one person is talking; trouble hearing in noisy places like a restaurant or on the phone; and sounds frequently sounding muffled—or people often sounding like they’re mumbling.

At any age, at any stage in life: If a person notices signs of hearing loss or is concerned about their or a loved one’s hearing, they should have their hearing tested. An ASHA-certified audiologist can conduct a full hearing evaluation. A searchable database of certified audiologists is available at [www.asha.org/profind](http://www.asha.org/profind). Not only can an audiologist measure exact hearing levels, but they can also rule out other medical conditions that could be causing hearing difficulties.

Usually, hearing evaluations are covered by private insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare—even if hearing aids aren’t. Audiologists can provide information about financial assistance and ways to make hearing aids more affordable—as well as advise people if they are good candidates for over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids. These OTC devices are only for adults with self-perceived mild to moderate hearing loss—and are sold online and in stores. People who aren’t able to benefit from hearing aids can discuss whether they are a candidate for cochlear implants with an audiologist.

For more information about ear and hearing care, visit [www.asha.org/public](http://www.asha.org/public) or [www.ActNowonHearing.com](http://www.ActNowonHearing.com).