

A Physician's Guide to Advanced Hearing Loss

Who Has Hearing Loss?



“Even the most advanced hearing loss can benefit from appropriately selected amplification that is custom fit and programmed to the patient’s unique needs, preferences and expectations.”

— Tim Steele, Ph.D., FAAA
President
Associated Audiologists



Lisa Battani, Au.D., FAAA, Hearing Aid Program Director, performs a real-ear measurement.

According to a report from the Better Hearing Institute on the Impact of Treated Hearing Loss on Quality of Life, 65 percent of people with hearing loss are below the age of 65; and nearly half of all people with hearing loss are below the age of 55. These statistics are borne out in our own clinics. The average age of Associated Audiologists’ patients is now 60 years old, with an equal distribution between males and females (50/50).

While the stereotype of a hearing aid wearer is of an older male, clearly, the statistics paint a different picture. Hearing loss is impacting younger and younger individuals, often while they are still in the workforce leading active lives.

Impact of Hearing Loss

According to a highly respected survey from the MarkeTrak¹ hearing loss panel which utilizes the National Family Opinion Panel,

hearing aids are associated with impressive improvements in the social, emotional, psychological and physical well-being of people who wear them, whether their hearing loss is mild or severe. Some of the quality of life findings in this report showed that hearing aid wearers had:

- Greater earning power.
- Improved interpersonal relationships.
- Reduction in difficulty associated with communication.
- Reduction in incidence of depressive and depressive symptoms, as well as paranoid feelings, anxiety and social phobias.
- Improved cognitive function and health status.

In addition, there are a number of other studies that show impressive benefits for hearing aid wearers, especially in the area

of cognitive function and a reduced risk of dementia, as well as a reduced risk for falls and hospitalizations.

Advanced Technology for Active Patients

The most advanced technology, which is available only through a professional practice, is helping younger and younger individuals remain in the workforce, and lead active lives. Some of the recent innovations now available for individuals with hearing loss include:

“Smart” Hearing Aids – This is the latest hearing aid technology. It makes it possible for a hearing aid to learn from the wearer’s preferences and even compile their preferences with those of other wearers around the world. Users can tell their smart hearing aids which sounds they prefer by choosing between sound suggestions provided by their smartphone via a hearing app. Then, a powerful processor uses this data to deliver even better real-life sound, based on the wearer’s personal preferences, in real time.

An added bonus is intuitive and simple-to-use one-touch controls, which let wearers choose their hearing preferences. And, smart hearing aid wearers don’t have to remember the exact changes they made to the fine tuning on future visits to that setting. The hearing aid remembers those settings for them. Smart hearing aids also map the environment the individual is in and prioritize key sounds, reacting to changing environments.

Best for: *Patients who embrace technology. These hearing aids offer superior sound quality and are more responsive than any hearing aid previously available.*

Rechargeable Hearing Aids – Rechargeable hearing aids use rechargeable silver zinc micro-batteries. These hearing aids use the lowest amount of energy of any rechargeable. All rechargeable hearing aids can be recharged overnight, just like a cell phone. There is also one manufacturer that allows these hearing aids to utilize traditional zinc-air batteries as a back-up power source.

Rechargeable hearing aids also are becoming increasingly popular, often because

the perception is that they are a less expensive, “greener” option. But traditional hearing aids/batteries are still a practical and budget-friendly choice for many patients, and when disposed of properly, since they are mercury-free, they are more “green” than in the past.

Best for: *Patients who want to move away from using traditional batteries, or who may have limited dexterity, visual limitations, or difficulty inserting traditional batteries into their hearing aids.*

Hearing Assistive Technology & Bluetooth – Most hearing aids have optional technology available to improve hearing when talking on the phone, listening to the TV or communicating with family and friends in complex listening environments. These devices utilize wireless connectivity with Bluetooth phone features to improve the listening experience. In some cases there are apps to turn smart phones into sophisticated remote controls for the hearing device.

Three innovative accessories include a remote mic (or spouse mic) that streams the conversation partner’s voice directly to the hearing aids; a television listening device that streams program sound directly to the hearing aids; and a device that streams calls and music directly to the hearing aids.

Best for: *Patients who need better hearing for multiple environments, who enjoy better smart phone performance, or who want a “boost” to help improve hearing in difficult listening situations.*

Best Practice

Professional practices, such as Associated Audiologists, use state-of-the-art diagnostic testing to determine the patient’s hearing loss and make recommendations for the patient based on these results, along with lifestyle and budget. In addition, our clinics utilize real-ear verification to be certain the patient’s hearing aids are performing optimally, no matter what the level of technology. Only 30 percent of all practices nationwide utilize this best practice. And, professional practices should provide patients with follow-up and support, including opportunities for aural rehabilitation and instruction in how to use their new hearing aid technology.

References

- 1 The Impact of Treated Hearing Loss on Quality of Life: www.betterhearing.org/sites/default/files/quality_of_life.pdf. Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D., Better Hearing Institute. Accessed 6/7/2018.
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