

Hearing Loss



Uncle Joe says everyone is mumbling. He says he was never told about something and wonders why people are keeping things from him? You think he's just not listening. Or...could it be that he just doesn't hear as well as he once did?

The causes for hearing loss are varied: wax buildup in the ear canal, infections, tumors, medicines, injuries, and noise. Our world is a noisy one. Jet planes, music, traffic, lawn mowers and many other culprits impact our hearing.

How to Protect Your Hearing

As we age, it's going to happen. We probably won't even notice it -- at first. There may be slight changes, they might even be unnoticeable. The fact is 28 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. We will probably adapt to those changes by becoming better listeners or perhaps by becoming more attune to the subtleties of facial expressions or lip movements. These adaptations are generally unconscious ones.

The changes in our hearing loss could be permanent. The smart ones among us will protect the hearing we have left. How can we do that?

- **Lower the volume.** If after mowing the lawn, using equipment such as weed eaters or tillers, or attending a rock concert you notice ringing in your ears, your ears may have just suffered damage. Use ear plugs or ear muffs to allow you to hear sounds without the volume. You can get these at a variety of places: audiologists, drugstores, home-repair stores, sporting goods stores, variety stores, etc. If your workplace is noisy, your employer may be required to provide you with ear protection.



- **Get a hearing checkup.** It is recommended that at the age of 40 we get a baseline exam. Once you notice a hearing change *or* after the age of 65, get a checkup every year. The earlier a hearing loss is caught, the easier it will be to prevent it from becoming worse. And it can be difficult to fit hearing aids once the loss has become severe. Perhaps your exam will give you good news. One of the most common causes of hearing loss is also one of the easiest to fix: wax buildup.



- **Read the medicine label.** Some medications--such as aspirin, chemotherapy drugs, and aminoglycosides, a family of strong antibiotics--affect hearing. If you are taking any of these medications and you notice a change in your hearing, tell your doctor right away.
- **Give your brain a workout.** Understanding what we are hearing does not happen only in the ear. We use our brains to give us contextual clues.