



Tell your doctor  
if you've noticed  
you have trouble  
hearing in certain  
situations.

## Speak up for your hearing

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT HEARING LOSS

### Why is it important?

- )) We now know that our hearing plays a greater role in our wellbeing than we ever realized.
- )) Research shows that untreated hearing loss may be tied to other serious health conditions—from depression to dementia.
- )) The good news is, studies also show that treating hearing loss improves quality of life.

### It's up to you to start the conversation.

- )) More than ever before, our health is in our own hands.
- )) Most hard-working doctors are pressed for time. And about 3 out of 4 adult physical exams don't include a hearing screening.

**So it's up to you to be an advocate for your own hearing.**

# Take note of your hearing.

The first step to ensure you get appropriate hearing health care is to pay attention to your hearing. Watch for telltale signs of hearing loss.

## Ask yourself:

- » Do I often need people to repeat things I didn't catch the first time?
- » Is it hard to follow the conversation with more than two people?
- » Does it seem like a lot of people mumble or sound muffled?
- » Do restaurants, crowded meeting rooms, malls, or other noisy places make it tough to follow the conversation?
- » Do I turn up the radio or TV pretty regularly to hear it better?
- » Is it harder to hear children and women?
- » Do I watch people's faces to better understand what they're saying?
- » Is there a frequent ringing or buzzing in my ears?

## If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have hearing loss.

For most people, hearing loss comes on gradually. They don't even notice it until it's likely putting a strain on their cognition and quality of life, without their even realizing it.

It's this hidden nature of hearing loss that makes it so important to stay alert to the common indicators listed above.

Only about **1 in 4** had their hearing screened as part of a physical exam in the last year. *(BHI)*

Yet, about **1 in 4** U.S. adults who report excellent to good hearing already have hearing damage. *(CDC)*

**Patients** are more likely to initiate the conversation about hearing than their **doctors**. *(BHI)*



## Tell your doctors what they need to hear.

It helps to just jump right into the conversation. Tell your doctor that your hearing is very important to you and that you want to make sure that if you do have hearing loss it gets addressed quickly.

### **Be direct. Ask to make a hearing screening part of your routine care.**

Talk to your doctor about:

- » Any family history of hearing loss.
- » Medicines you're taking, or have taken for extended periods in the past. Some medications can increase the risk of hearing loss.
- » Health conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and moderate chronic kidney disease, which may increase your risk of hearing loss.
- » Frequent exposure to noise on the job or as part of life—like loud concerts, sporting events, motorsports, hunting, regular use of earbuds and headphones, power tools, etc.

Hearing loss has been linked to other health conditions, including:

- Dementia
- Depression
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Moderate chronic kidney disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Sleep apnea
- Obesity
- Increased risk of falls
- Increased risk of hospitalization
- Increased mortality
- Memory loss & cognitive decline

# Ask for a baseline hearing exam.

## More common than you think:

About **1 in 8** adults in the U.S. say they have hearing difficulty. (BHI)

About **1 in 21** 18-39 year olds already have hearing loss. (BHI)

About **1 in 10** 40-49 year olds say they have hearing difficulty. (BHI)

About **1 in 6** 50-69 year olds have problems hearing. (BHI)

**A comprehensive baseline exam by a hearing care professional is very important for monitoring your hearing health.**

- » Ask your doctor to refer you to a local hearing care professional who has the equipment and training to give you a comprehensive hearing test—especially if you're experiencing hearing difficulty.
- » Ask for that report to be shared with your primary care provider.
- » You also may want to take the online BHI Hearing Check at home and bring the results with you to discuss them with your doctor. The Better Hearing Institute (BHI) offers the check at [www.betterhearing.org/check-your-hearing](http://www.betterhearing.org/check-your-hearing).

## HELP YOUR DOCTOR OUT BY SPEAKING UP

Most people with hearing loss hear better in quiet environments—like your doctor's office.

Without a screening or your questions, it can be difficult for your doctor to even realize you have hearing loss or recognize the extent of your problem.

# Why do we lose our hearing?

- » We hear when delicate hair cells in our inner ear vibrate, creating nerve signals that the brain understands as sound. But we can overload these hair cells just like we can overload an electrical circuit.
- » Despite the association of hearing loss with age, loud noise is a big culprit. It can damage these hair cells, causing sensorineural hearing loss and often tinnitus (ringing in the ears). The cells in the inner ear that enable us to hear higher-frequency sounds clearly—like singing birds and children speaking—are typically the first to go.
- » That's one reason why people with undiagnosed hearing loss usually aren't fully aware of what they're missing. The ability to hear lower frequency sounds gives the illusion that their hearing is just fine, when it's not. And the strain of listening may be putting an unnecessary burden on the individual's cognition and quality of life.

Hearing loss that comes on suddenly should be treated urgently with an immediate visit to a doctor, preferably an ear, nose & throat specialist.

# Some people are more likely to have hearing loss.

Certain conditions and situations may increase the chance that someone will develop hearing loss. These include:

- )) Frequent exposure to loud recreational, social, and community activities.
- )) Loud work environments.
- )) Certain medicines (ototoxic) that can damage hearing.
- )) Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, moderate chronic kidney disease, among other chronic health conditions.
- )) Being 40 and older.
- )) Being male—men (20-69 years) are nearly twice as likely to have hearing loss. (NIDCD)

## EMOTIONAL SIDE-EFFECTS OF LEAVING HEARING LOSS UNTREATED

- Feeling stressed out from straining to hear what others are saying.
- Feeling annoyed at other people because you can't hear or understand them.
- Feeling embarrassed when meeting new people or from misunderstanding what others are saying.
- Feeling nervous about trying to hear and understand.
- Feeling frustrated with your hearing when talking to family or friends.
- Withdrawing from social situations you once enjoyed because it's hard to hear.

Nearly **60%** of people in the U.S. with hearing loss are still working age (18-67). (BHI)