

Common Myths about Hearing Loss and Hearing Aids

Submitted by Mary Maddock Au.D.

Adapted from The Consumer Handbook on Hearing Loss and Hearing Aids
Chapter Two by Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D.

There are many common myths still prevalent about hearing loss and hearing aids.

Your hearing loss cannot be helped.

In the past, many people with high frequency hearing loss or with nerve damage have been told they cannot be helped. This may have been true many years ago, but with modern advances in technology, nearly 95 percent of people with a nerve hearing loss CAN be helped with hearing aids.

Hearing loss affects only “old people” and is merely a sign of aging.

Only 35 percent of people with hearing loss are older than 64. There are close to six million people in the US between the ages of 18 and 44 with hearing loss and more than one million are school age. Hearing loss affects all age groups.

Causes of hearing loss include age related nerve hearing loss called presbycusis. Noise induced hearing loss is also a nerve hearing loss. This type of hearing loss is the result of loud noises that people are exposed to in the workplace, listening to loud music, some loud children’s toys or recreational noise such as target shooting without the benefit of hearing protection.

If I had a hearing loss, my family doctor would have told me.

Not true! Less than 20% of physicians perform formal hearing screenings on their adult patients. Since most hearing impaired people hear well in quiet environments like your doctor’s office, it can be virtually impossible for your physician to recognize the degree of your hearing loss.

The consequences of hiding hearing loss are better than wearing hearing aids.

“Your hearing loss is more conspicuous than your hearing aids.” What price are you paying for vanity? If you miss a punch line to a joke, or respond inappropriately in conversation, people may have concerns about your mental acuity, your attention span or your ability to communicate effectively. The personal consequences of vanity can be life altering. At a simplistic level, untreated hearing loss means giving up some of the pleasant sounds you used to enjoy. At a deeper level, vanity could severely reduce the quality of your life.

Only people with serious hearing loss need hearing aids.

The need for hearing amplification is dependent on your lifestyle, your need for refined hearing, and the degree of your hearing loss. If you are a lawyer, a teacher or a psychologist, where very refined hearing is necessary to discern the nuances of human communication, then even a mild hearing loss can be intolerable. Use of amplification by someone with significant communication needs is critical. On the other hand, if you lead a sedentary lifestyle and only communicate with others in the quiet of your own home then more hearing loss may be tolerated prior to the purchase of amplification. If your hearing interferes with your ability to hear and understand others in any of your life situations then you should pursue hearing amplification.

My hearing loss is normal for my age

Isn't that a strange way to look at things? Unfortunately people are told that every day. Consider this analogy. It happens to be "normal" for overweight people to have high blood pressure. That doesn't mean they should not receive treatment for the problem.

I have one ear that's down a little, but the other one is okay.

Everything is relative. Nearly all patients who believe that they have one "good" ear actually have two "bad" ears. When one ear is slightly better than the other, we learn to favor that ear for the telephone, group conversations and so forth. It can give the illusion that "the better ear" is normal when it is not. Most types of hearing loss affect both ears fairly equally, and about 90 percent of patients are in need of hearing aids for both ears.

Hearing aids will make me look "older".

Looking older is clearly more affected by almost all other factors besides hearing aids. It's not the hearing aids that make one look older, it's what one may believe they imply. If hearing aids help you function like a normal hearing person, for all intents and purposes, the stigma is removed. Hearing aid manufacturers are well aware that cosmetics are an issue to many people. But more importantly, keep in mind that "hearing loss is more obvious than a hearing aid." Smiling and nodding your head when you don't understand what is being said makes your condition more apparent than the largest hearing aid.

Hearing aids will make everything sound too loud.

Hearing aids are amplifiers. Today's hearing aids are digital and provide amplification based on the loudness of the signal coming in to the instrument. The most sophisticated hearing aids keep the soft sounds soft, the medium sounds medium and the loud sounds loud. They will provide you with the necessary sounds to understand speech but it is the responsibility of your brain to interpret the sounds provided by the hearing aids. Working with your hearing health care professional to program the instrument for your individual needs is critical.

Hearing aids can provide a significant positive impact to your life. They will not provide an instant cure for your hearing difficulties, but with patience, you will find they can be your bridge to hearing better.

For more information on hearing, hearing loss and hearing aids please contact Dr. Mary Maddock Au.D at Wilmington Hearing Specialists, PA. Dr. Maddock's office is located at 1221 Floral Parkway #104 in Wilmington. She can be reached at 791-4755.