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Hearing Loss and the Impact on Your Health

Many people will experience hearing loss as they age. Age-related hearing loss is called presbycusis and is the slow loss of hearing that occurs as we age. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one-third of people over 70 are hearing impaired. While there is no specific cause for age-related hearing loss, some factors can contribute to the problem, such as family history, repeated exposure to loud noises, smoking, certain medical conditions, a history of ear infections, and certain medications.

Those with diminished hearing often experience a poorer quality of life, social isolation, cognitive decline, and decreased mobility. Hearing loss can have a significant impact on our daily lives. Conversations can be more difficult both in person and on the phone. People with hearing loss could have trouble understanding the instructions given by their healthcare provider and listening to the T.V. or radio. Other signs of hearing loss include hearing problems in noisy areas, difficulty understanding people with high-pitched voices, or having ringing in their ears. Other people can misinterpret a lack of hearing as rude, uncaring, or confused. These problems can lead to embarrassment and withdrawal from social situations.

Researchers at UC San Diego have also been trying to understand the link between hearing loss and increased risks of dementia. There may be a link between the part of the brain related to processing sound and the part of the brain related to attention. These findings emphasize the importance of protecting one's hearing throughout one's life.

Hearing loss often goes undetected and undiagnosed due to stigma, cost, and the belief that hearing aids are not effective. If you believe you are suffering from hearing loss, reach out to your healthcare provider. They can perform a physical exam to see what is potentially causing your hearing loss. It could be something as simple as earwax. You might then be sent to a specialist for further examination to determine the extent of your hearing loss.

Treatment options are available if your healthcare provider determines you have hearing loss. While there is no cure for age-related hearing loss, you may consider the following:

- **Hearing aids:** Many advances have been made over the last few years. Many hearing aids are small and fit discreetly in the ear. While hearing aids are available over the counter, you will need to consult with an audiologist to get the best results. They will be able to ensure that you are correctly fitted with a device that is right for you.
- **Cochlear Implants:** These may be recommended for people with severe hearing loss. Surgery is required to place the implant. The implants allow people to detect sounds again and, with practice, can help them understand speech, but they do not restore normal hearing.

Age-related hearing loss often gets worse and cannot be reversed. The good news is that your hearing loss can be managed. Not treating hearing loss can have many negative consequences. With help from your healthcare providers, you can continue to live a full and active life.