

Don't Let Hearing Loss Dampen Family Festivities



If you have a family member or friend with hearing loss, the holidays bring unique challenges. While many people look forward all year to family gatherings and holiday parties, those with hearing loss may feel apprehensive or anxious.

One of the first signs of hearing loss is difficulty hearing in noisy environments. It can be especially difficult to understand speech over background

noise like dinner music or a football game on TV. This is due to high-tone, nerve-type hearing loss that affects consonant sounds (necessary to understand words) that are in high frequencies.

It can be confusing because in quiet environments, a person may be able to hear and understand speech just fine. But add background noise, and he or she may only hear a low drone and miss the high-frequency sounds of speech.

"Just Getting By" Means Missing Out

It's estimated that 10% of the U.S. population has hearing loss. Many don't know they have a hearing problem or are reluctant to seek help. They may feel embarrassed or think they can "just get by" without treatment. But that means asking others to constantly re-

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Full-Time Versus Part-Time Hearing

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FULL-TIME HEARING

If someone—we'll call her Mrs. Jones—uses her hearing aids full-time, her ears and brain become used to hearing more of the sounds in her environment. She becomes more comfortable with these sounds and she can become better at understanding the different sounds. Once that adjustment is made (and it can take several weeks), this becomes Mrs. Jones' new sound world.

But what if Mrs. Jones only uses her hearing aids when she goes out, or when she watches television? Perhaps she uses them only 4 hours a day. While using her hearing aids, she might hear 90% of the sound environment. The rest of the time she might hear only 50% of the environment. Which environment do her ears and brain adjust to? (Answer: neither.)

In other words, your ears become used to a certain sound world. Sometimes that world is quiet; sometimes it's noisy. Sometimes you're in an easy hearing situation, and sometimes hearing is difficult. If you use your hearing aids only when you have to, both your sound world and your hearing are always changing—and you probably won't be fully comfortable or receive the most benefit from your hearing aids. Our recommendation: Keep your hearing in good shape! Let your ears develop the habit of better hearing full-time by using your hearing aids full-time.

Our Staff



Matthew T. Frisk, Au.D., CCC-A



James L. Frisk, F.A.C.S., MD



Brad E. Grondahl, BC-HIS



Dave J. Ross, OHC

Two is Better than One *Continued...*

deprived ear will become more and more lazy, so it is important not to wait too long.

Two hearing aids can also make sounds more enjoyable and more comfortable to listen to. It becomes less of a strain to hear, and sounds have the kind of clarity and depth that provide a sense of space and volume. In other words, you get more out of the sounds in the world around you.

Double the Benefit from Someone That Knows...

Annette Lindholm has a mild hearing loss in both ears, but because she has had psoriasis she could only wear one hearing aid at a time. When Annette discovered that her instrument didn't aggravate her skin condition, she heeded the advice of hearing specialists and began wearing two instruments. These tiny CIC instruments fit completely in the ear canal.

"And I'm glad I decided to try with two because the effect was more than twice as good!" says Annette contentedly. "When

you can hear with both ears, it's much easier to discriminate where sounds come from—it's more balanced, more varied, and it feels more natural. I didn't find it difficult to adapt to wearing two—it's been remarkable easy really. Whether I'm sitting alone with someone or attending meetings or conferences, speech comes through more clearly than before."

Annette is delighted at this change in sound quality. "Now that I've experienced the difference I wouldn't dream of going back to only one instrument. Generally I wear them every waking hour of the day. I went on hiking holiday last summer and actually went in the shower with them on by mistake! I completely forgot that I was wearing them—that's how good they are."



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Hearing Solutions, Inc.

2700 12th Ave S, Suite D Fargo, ND 58103

(701) 232-2438 1-800-851-4327

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peat themselves, feeling left out of conversations and not fully participating in festivities that could create cherished memories.

Many people experience depression during the holiday season for a variety of reasons, including health problems. Adults who suffer from untreated hearing loss are more likely to report feelings of depression and anxiety than those whose hearing loss has been treated.*

How to Offer Support and Encouragement

Family members and friends can encourage those with hearing loss to do something about it. Here are some suggestions:

Let them know they are not alone. One in six baby boomers (ages 41-59) have a hearing problem, and one in 14 Generation Xers (ages 29-40) already have hearing loss.**

Discuss advancements in technology. Today's digital hearing instruments are not what most people expect. They can best be compared to tiny, yet highly sophisticated sound studios – processing and reproducing sounds faithfully.

Dispel myths. Just because someone has hearing loss, it does not mean he or she is going deaf. However, it is important to see a hearing healthcare professional to find the cause of the hearing loss and prevent it from worsening. Show them their hearing is important. Hearing loss can occur gradually – sometimes over many years. Perhaps they have forgotten how important hearing is to their quality of life. Reminiscing together about special gatherings may remind them of the times they, too, enjoyed the holiday bustle.

*National Council on Aging

**Better Hearing Institute

Full-Time Versus Part Time Hearing

We occasionally hear of someone who uses his or her hearing aids "only when they have to," such as when they're with a group of people or in a noisy place, where hearing is difficult.

But the people who are most comfortable and who receive the most benefit from their hearing aids are the ones who use them full-time. That's why we encourage you to use your hearing aids—and your hearing—full-time, even in easy listening situations and even when you're alone.

Why use your hearing aids even in places where you can get along without them?

Hearing is something like exercise—the more you use it, the better shape it's in. That's because your ears—and your brain—become used to a certain "sound world." If someone with a hearing loss doesn't use hearing aids, their ears—and their brain—become used to a less stimulating sound world. Their ears aren't being "exercised" regularly by all the speech, music and noise around them.

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Two is Better than One



driver honks his horn, the sound will reach your right ear a fraction of a second before it reaches your left ear. And it will arrive with a certain power and intensity. Your brain immediately processes this information and tells you exactly what you need to know: where the car is coming from and at what distance.

Two hearing aids are always better than one—not because they make sounds twice as loud, but because they provide a more natural perception of sound.

Imagine listening to your favorite program on the stereo. It has two amplifiers and two speakers to give music and speech a natural depth. If only one amplifier and speaker are working, the sounds become shallow and flat. This is how people who only wear one hearing aid, but should be wearing two, may also perceive sound. And that puts them at a disadvantage.

Firstly, their ability to localize sounds is compromised. This is because the brain needs input from both ears to find out where sounds are coming from.

Imagine being on a busy street. If a car is approaching from the right and the

Enjoy the Details

Another area that demands good hearing in both ears is when you are in a noisy environment, trying to focus on a conversation. It could be at a party, for instance, where everyone is talking and people are constantly moving around. Once again, the brain needs input from both ears in order to separate the uninteresting, background sounds from the more amusing speech sounds in the foreground. With two hearing aids, you have a much better chance of hearing and understanding what is being said.

Perhaps one of the most important reasons to wear two hearing aids is that they reduce the risk of a condition known as "auditory deprivation." This is when the brain gradually loses some of its ability to process information from the unaided ear because of a continued lack of sound stimulation A

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