Hearing HealthCare News©

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends

Summer 2018

Hearing Complaints from People with Normal Hearing

Our hearing world can be very demanding. We get phone calls from people we don't know—and they talk fast. We watch television programs—and the actors mumble. Movies are made to be realistic—which means noisy. People find it hard to hear in restaurants—and that complaint is from people with normal hearing.

Even people with excellent hearing have difficult hearing in many places. Here is a list of the places that people with normal hearing complain about. Do these sound familiar?

Restaurants. One of the most common complaints about restaurants is how *noisy* they are.

Most restaurants make little effort to control noise levels. Glass tables and hard walls and floors make voices and noise bounce around the dining area. As people talk louder to be heard, everyone else talks louder and the restaurant gets even noisier.

Movies. Movies often have background music and several people talking at the same time. It all makes understanding what the actors are saying a real challenge.

Wedding receptions. Many people complain, "*The music is too loud!*" And have you ever heard someone wish that the band played louder? When the band is playing, understanding the person across the table (or even right next to you) can be nearly impossible.

Public announcements. Whether it's the flight attendant on an airplane or the public address system at an airport or rail terminal, the announcer often makes no effort to speak clearly. We recommend looking for video displays instead.

Television. How well we can understand speech on television depends on the program, the station, and your television set. News announcers are usually easier to understand because they talk to be understood—and you can see them. Some actors mumble (think of Kiefer Sutherland in *Designated Survivor*). Actors with accents are more difficult, such as in *The Crown* and *Downton Abbey*.

Even people with excellent hearing say these listening situations can be difficult. How do these compare with *your* toughest listening places?

Do Older Adults Hear Differently?

Many people will experience hearing loss as they get older. The hearing of the typical 40-year old is already slightly poorer than the hearing of the typical 18-year old.

Presbycusis—the loss of hearing due to aging—is one of the most common causes of hearing loss. The most common pattern is a loss of hearing for the high-pitched sounds important for understanding speech. In other words, you can still hear speech, but may feel that *"I can hear but I can't understand."*

Even older adults with normal hearing have greater difficulty in noisy settings.

Older adults—meaning adults 50 years old and over—may experience more difficulty understanding complex sounds even if they have normal hearing. These adults may not have difficulty understanding speech in a quiet room or talking with one person.

But older adults may have significantly more difficulty understanding speech in noisy conditions, such as a busy restaurant. *This increased difficulty develops even in older adults with normal hearing.*

Hearing with our ears and our brain

Although our ears *hear* the sounds around us, it is our hearing nerve and our brain that allow us to *understand* those sounds. There is more and more evidence that as we get older, there are changes in the auditory system independent of any loss of hearing sensitivity. These changes include a slowing in the speed at which our nerves transmit signals. In other words, it's not only our ears that can be the source of hearing difficulties—it's also our brain.

As we get older, there are changes in our hearing independent of any loss of hearing sensitivity.

As a result, older adults may have greater difficulty in noisy settings compared to younger individuals with the same hearing levels. This may also explain why it is not unusual for someone to think his or her hearing has gotten worse even when hearing levels and the ability to understand speech in quiet are unchanged.

Hearing aids

The effects of these changes in the hearing nerves and brain may be minimized by using hearing aids to stimulate the auditory system (as well as to provide better hearing). But as important as they are, remember that hearing aids do not correct or cure these changes to the central auditory system. Other communication strategies, such as lipreading and avoiding noisy restaurants, can also be very helpful.

Battery tip: *When you remove the tab from a battery, wait a minute or two before using. That allows the battery to charge up from the surrounding air. That's right—today's 100% mercury-free batteries run on air!*

Your Ears: At Risk for Skin Cancer

Will you be getting some sun over the summer? If so, be careful. As small as our ears are, a third of all skin cancers occur on them.

About 85% of ear skin cancers occur in men. That's probably because of their shorter hair and being out in the sun more often.

Other than staying out of the sun, your best preventative is regular and liberal use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen. Take special care to apply sunscreen to the complex structures and grooves of the ears. And be sure to include the back of your ear, where a full third of ear skin cancers occur.

WELCOME

. . . to our summer newsletter. We hope the information is useful to you and to your family and friends.

Our practice is based on these fundamental principles:

- ***Hearing loss is serious***
- ***Hearing loss deserves professional care***
- ***Hearing aids work***

How Do We Hear? Anatomy of the Ear

Our ability to hear is nothing short of a miracle.

If we heard any better, we would hear the movement of the air molecules around us. And although some animals have better hearing for certain pitches, human hearing is most sensitive in the range of 500 to 3000 Hertz (cycles per second), which is precisely the range of the human speaking voice.

The outer ear

The outer ear, the only part of the ear we actually see, increases our hearing sensitivity by about 10 decibels (dB) and helps us to locate the source of the sound.

The ear canal is also part of the outer ear and leads to the eardrum. The eardrum vibrates when sound waves arrive at it and transfers the sound energy to the bones of the middle ear.

The middle ear

The middle ear is an air-filled space containing the three smallest bones in the human body, the *hammer, anvil* and *stirrup*.

"If we heard any better, we would hear the air molecules moving around us."

These tiny bones—all three together fit on a fingernail—direct the vibrations to the fluids of the inner ear.

The inner ear

The inner ear is made up of several fluid-filled canals. The energy waves enter the inner ear and create pressure waves. These waves stimulate nerve cells within the inner ear, which then sends nerve impulses along the auditory nerve to the brain.

The brain

Although it is the outer, middle and inner ear that allow us to detect sounds, it is our brain that allows us to process and understand the meaning of those sounds. Our brain—using the input from our ears—decodes the complex signals such as speech that are a part of our everyday life.

Our amazing ears—and our brains—are able to detect and process millions of different sounds, and allow us to communicate with the people around us.

davison audiology
Professional Hearing Health Care Services

"Where Physicians Refer Their Patients"

Business Office:
Spring Park Avenue
St. Clairsville, OH 43950

SU18/1000

Summer Travel Tips

Are you traveling this summer? Here are some suggestions for your trip:

Reservations

If you can, make your reservations on-line so hearing is not an issue. If you're making reservations over the phone:

- Let the agent know you have a hearing loss.
- Repeat the information to confirm the details.
- Ask for a *written* confirmation.

Your trip

- Pack a de-humidifier kit or other durable container to protect your hearing aids.
- Consider carrying a spare set of hearing aids.
- Public announcements can be difficult to understand. Look for video monitors that post information about gates and departure times.

Hotels and Cruise Ships

- Most provide assistive listening devices including smoke and fire alarms.
- Let someone at the front desk know you have a hearing loss in case of emergency.

The Audiologists and staff at Davison Audiology
For all appointments, call (740) 695-1058

Ohio Valley Medical Center in Wheeling, WV
Witten Professional Building in New Martinsville, WV
East Ohio Regional Hospital in Martins Ferry, OH
Barnesville Medical Center in Barnesville, OH
Visit us at **www.davisonaudiology.com** • E-mail: **questions@davisonaudiology.com**