

MYTHS ABOUT HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss is a health condition that is invisible and often misunderstood. Some common misperceptions perpetuate the stigma and stereotypes associated with hearing loss, as well as the belief that hearing loss is unimportant and does not require treatment.



*Myths
Facts!*

MYTH: Hearing loss affects only “old people.”

FACT: Hearing loss affects all age groups.

- 60% of people with hearing loss are in the work force or education settings.
- About 2-3 of every 1000 children in the U.S. are born with a detectable hearing loss in one or both ears.
- Almost 15% of school-age children (ages 6-19) have some degree of hearing loss.

(Source: Hearing Loss Association of America)

MYTH: A mild or moderate hearing loss is not important.

FACT: Any hearing loss can adversely affect a child’s ability to learn and an adult’s interactions with others.

- Even a mild hearing loss can delay learning, socialization, and speech development in children, and can lead to diminished self-esteem in both children and adults.
- People with mild hearing loss often experience difficulty understanding speech, especially in the presence of background noise.

(Sources: Audiology Online; Scott Bally, Ph.D.-Gallaudet University)

MYTH: Hearing aids/cochlear implants are like eyeglasses and can cure hearing loss.

FACT: Hearing aids and cochlear implants can greatly improve people’s ability to understand spoken language, but they do not restore normal hearing.

- Hearing aids, even those that are most technologically advanced, help many people, but the primary benefit of hearing aids is to amplify sound rather than to make it clearer.
- Hearing through a cochlear implant is different from normal hearing and takes time to learn or relearn. However, it allows many people to better comprehend speech, as well as recognize warning signals and other environmental sounds.

(Sources: Scott Bally, Ph.D.-Gallaudet University National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders)

MYTH: I can wait to get hearing aids until I cannot hear any sounds at all.

FACT: The longer you wait, the harder your hearing loss will be to treat.

- If the auditory system in your brain is not stimulated, the brain stops recognizing sounds. The sooner you treat your hearing loss, the easier it will be for your brain to “relearn” how to hear.

(Source: AARP)

MYTH: American Sign Language (ASL) is the logical communication option for all people with a significant hearing loss.

FACT: Estimates are that 2 percent or fewer people with hearing loss are fluent in ASL.

- While ASL may work well for people within the Deaf community where everyone uses ASL, the majority of people with hearing loss grew up in a hearing world and communicate orally.
- Especially for those who lose hearing later in life, learning an entirely new language and teaching it to family and friends may not be practical. Captioning, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive technologies may be more realistic options.

(Source: Scott Bally, Ph.D.-Gallaudet University)

MYTH: If I had a hearing loss, my doctor would have informed me.

FACT: Only about two thirds of primary care physicians screen for hearing loss during a routine physical exam.

- If you suspect you have a hearing loss, see an ENT (ear, nose, and throat doctor) or ask your primary care physician to test your hearing and rule out any medical conditions.

(Sources: AARP, Hearing Loss Association of America)

MYTH: Hearing loss is a normal sign of aging, so does not require treatment.

FACT: Untreated hearing loss has been linked to serious physical and mental health conditions, including dementia, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and higher risk of mortality.

- A recent study at the Medical University of South Carolina found that people with untreated hearing loss had substantially higher medical bills compared to those without hearing loss.
- A Johns Hopkins University study found that those aged 70+ with moderate to severe hearing loss had a 54% higher risk of mortality.
- People who have treated their hearing loss by using hearing aids and other assistive technology have reported a significantly higher quality of life than those whose hearing loss remains untreated.
- For people still in the workforce, untreated hearing loss can contribute to underperformance. More than 50% of people with hearing loss are under age 60 - the least likely age group to get hearing aids.

(Sources: Katherine Bouton, author of 'Living Better With Hearing Loss'; Hearing Loss Association of America)

MYTH: People with hearing loss are less competent.

FACT: People with hearing loss often must develop greater concentration skills to compensate for lack of hearing.

- Because people with hearing loss may need a statement repeated, or respond incorrectly or inappropriately to a question they misheard, they are often perceived as incompetent, stupid, and slow.
- Using communication strategies can help people with hearing loss understand speech better and converse more easily. Good communication requires the efforts of both the listener and the speaker.

(Sources: Scott Bally, Ph.D., Gallaudet University; Claudia Dewane, D.Ed., LCSW - Social Work Today)