

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

Hearing...Don't take it for granted



ESTHER BUSH

Hearing Health

This monthly series is a partnership of the New Pittsburgh Courier, Community PARTners (a core service of the University of Pittsburgh's Clinical and Translational Science Institute—CTSI), the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and the UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion. All articles can be accessed online at the New Pittsburgh Courier website. These pages will provide you with valuable information on health topics that may affect you, your family or friends and also connect you to local health initiatives and resources.

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page examines hearing and hearing loss. Jennifer Jones, MPH, community engagement coordinator with CTSI, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League, discussed this important aspect of our health.

JJ: Good afternoon, Ms. Bush. I hope you're staying warm in this frigid Pittsburgh winter! This month we are taking a more specific look at a health topic that sometimes does not get much attention—hearing health. Hearing is one of our five key senses. I know that it's a part of my health that I take for granted every day.

EB: I think that many of us take it for granted, Jennifer—until we start losing it. Dr. Palmer notes that 70 percent of people older than 70 have significant hearing loss. That's a large percentage of people in our community, especially since the Pittsburgh metropolitan area has a high number of older adults.

JJ: Yes, Esther; that is very true. Hearing loss is a sensitive topic. Older adults may be embarrassed to tell others that they're having difficulty hearing.

EB: As someone who is getting older, I do think that many people do not want to admit that they are aging. You find yourself turning up the TV a little bit louder or asking people to repeat what they just said, especially in a noisy place. It can be frustrating. But I am encouraged to hear about all the low-cost or free resources for hearing screenings and devices. Many of the resources Dr. Palmer mentioned I did not know about.

JJ: Yes, I agree. It's important for the community to know these resources exist. There is also a great nonprofit in Pittsburgh, the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc., that really works to bring services to the deaf community. Amy Hart, the center's president and CEO, really cares about the community. They have interpreting services, assistive technology services, behavioral health services, life skills programs and audiology services. Their website has a wealth of information. I encourage everyone to check it out for themselves, their loved ones or their friends.

EB: Thank you for sharing those resources. If you have trouble hearing, please don't sweep it under the rug. It will only get worse. Talk to your health care provider, and let the information on this health page show you that you're not alone and that there are many resources here in our community to help you.

JJ: Thank you for your time, Ms. Bush. Next month is the last "Take Charge of Your Health" page until the fall. We're focusing on a topic that is very relevant and affects many in the community—diabetes. There will be a lot of important information, and we hope everyone will read it. If anyone has any questions about the information on this page, e-mail PARTners@hs.pitt.edu.

Hearing is something most of us take for granted—until we start having problems with it. And we will. About 10 percent of the population has hearing loss; and 70 percent of people older than 70 have significant hearing loss, according to the University of Pittsburgh's Catherine Palmer, PhD, associate professor of communication science and disorders, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, and of otolaryngology, School of Medicine. Often, people accept hearing loss as a part of getting older. But some kinds of hearing loss are completely preventable. It's not a health problem that should go untreated.

"Research shows that the connection between hearing loss and healthy aging is clear," says Dr. Palmer. "Hearing loss is linked to depression, feeling isolated, not being able to live independently and to falls (not being able to hear affects balance and the ability to sense where you are in space). It affects the ability to communicate, which is essential to successful living. Significant hearing losses in children affect speech and language development, which in turn affect reading, educational success and social development."

An important first step in hearing health is for people to know whether they have hearing loss. Hearing health care can be confusing. Hearing exams are offered by retail stores. Hearing aid companies advertise directly to consumers. It can be hard to know where to find the best help. Dr.



Palmer says it's most important to see a licensed audiologist (someone who is trained to diagnose, manage and/or treat hearing or balance problems). For some people, an audiologist can offer simple solutions to help with communication. For example, make sure people are looking at you when they talk. Ask them to slow down when talking rather than shout. A low-cost television amplifier that sends a signal to headphones or a device that makes the phone louder helps. Using the captioning on the television can help. If hearing is difficult at the movies or live theater, ask for the listening system that the theater must provide by law (covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act). The signal comes right from the sound source into headphones.

If a test finds hearing loss, hearing aids can help. But they are

often not covered by insurance and can be expensive. Audiologists can help people find the most cost-effective solution.

one. Some people are born with hearing loss or inherit it. But for many people, the majority of hearing loss comes from our noisy

"Hearing loss is linked to depression, feeling isolated, not being able to live independently and to falls (not being able to hear affects balance and the ability to sense where you are in space). It affects the ability to communicate, which is essential to successful living."

CATHERINE PALMER, PHD

"There is no best hearing aid for everyone, but there is a best hearing aid for you," says Dr. Palmer. "People must wear their hearing aids all the time, though. They may not like them at first. Their brains are not used to all of this sound. After a period of wearing them full time (from when you wake up until you go to bed at night), the brain will adjust to the new sounds and ignore background sounds. If the aids aren't worn full time, this adjustment doesn't happen."

Dr. Palmer says there are perks to living in Western Pennsylvania for people with hearing loss. One is the UPMC Center for Audiology and Hearing Aids, of which she is the director. The center runs programs that offer hearing aids at low cost or no cost. It also provides free hearing screenings over the phone. The second is that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides hearing aids at no charge to people from birth to age 21.

Hearing loss can happen to any-

world. Hearing loss caused by noise is 100 percent preventable, says Dr. Palmer. It's also the most common kind of hearing loss.

"People must protect their hearing," she says. "There are good over-the-counter earplugs. The UPMC Center for Audiology and Hearing Aids offers low-cost musician earplugs that protect hearing while maintaining good sound quality. People make a huge mistake, thinking that one exposure won't matter, but it does. Even going to one concert can affect hearing. We can't fix those hearing losses. We can eventually provide hearing aids, but it's far better to prevent loss. A good rule of thumb is that if something sounds too loud to you, it could be damaging your hearing."

Have more questions or want to get your hearing tested? Contact the UPMC Center for Audiology and Hearing Aids at 412-647-2030 to schedule. Or, you can call 412-647-2400 for a free telephone hearing screening.



Understanding the facts of hearing loss

by Sharon Hughes-Morris and Amy Hart

Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc.

Hearing loss can have a profound impact on an individual's emotional, physical and social well-being. Hearing loss can affect a child who cannot hear well enough to learn in the classroom. If hearing loss is undiagnosed in children, it can lead to delayed speech, language, academic, social development and behavioral problems. Hearing loss can affect an older person who cannot understand important conversations or hear a smoke detector while sleeping.

For the 36 million Americans with hearing loss, the world can be an isolating and dangerous place. Approximately 17 percent of adults report some degree of hearing loss, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. Hearing loss affects 30 percent of people age 65-74 and 47 percent of those 75 or older. It is now being reported that 19 percent of young people 13-30 are showing signs of

hearing loss. This age group is becoming one of the fastest growing populations for people with hearing loss. One reason may be exposure to loud music.

Assistive technology, such as personal frequency modulation (FM) systems, can help enhance children's

learning in the classroom and adults' performance in employment or personal situations. Personal FM systems are like miniature radio stations that help make hearing clearer and easier. Other systems, like Loop, Large Area Listening FM and Infrared Systems, help people with hearing

problems to overcome background noise and distance in churches, auditoriums and theatres. By having less strain on the ear, people can enjoy these activities more. Assistive technology can also allow people, especially older people, to feel safe in their environment, keep in touch with loved ones and, in many cases, maintain their independence.

More information on hearing services and devices can be found here:

Center for Hearing and Deaf Services:

www.hdscenter.org

Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation:

www.patf.us

Hearing Loss Association of America:

www.hearingloss.org

Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP):

www.disabilities.temple.edu/programs/assistive/tddp/

Pennsylvania Department of Health Vocational Rehabilitation Services:

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/vocational_rehabilitation/10356

Table 1: Estimated Number of Persons with Hearing Loss, by Age Group and Gender Pittsburgh Metro Area, 2010 Census

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
12-19	548	273	820
20-29	509	709	1,218
30-39	1,052	3,330	4,381
40-49	7,615	14,094	21,709
50-59	11,588	36,882	48,470
60-69	22,777	47,180	69,957
70-79	44,939	44,145	89,083
80+	67,226	40,244	107,470
Total	156,253	186,857	343,110

Center for Hearing and Deaf Services

by Sharon Hughes-Morris and Amy Hart

Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc.

The Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc. (HDS) began in 1920 as the League for the Hard of Hearing. Its primary goal was to provide social activities for people with hearing loss. From these modest beginnings, HDS has evolved into our region's only comprehensive service center for individuals who are culturally deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing, and their friends and families. Its mission is to provide a diverse and affordable program of high-quality diagnos-



Center for Hearing & Deaf Services, Inc.

tic, rehabilitative and supportive services. HDS wants to meet the unique challenges of children and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing and to serve as an information and referral source for this population and the general public. The vision of HDS staff is to be caring professionals, serving persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, with excellence, dignity and trust.

HDS is located at 1945 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15219. You are invited to call for information or an appointment. The telephone number is 412-281-1375. More information can be found online at www.hdscenter.org.