### Northern Hearing Health Centre

### YOUR GUIDE TO HEALTHY HEARING

Hearing health is important for your overall health.

northernhearinghealth.ca

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# TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH, STARTING WITH YOUR EARS

### Your hearing directly affects your overall health, well-being and

**quality of life.** Researchers are always discovering connections between the ears and the health of other systems in our body. Some health conditions are caused by hearing loss, while others cause hearing loss. One thing is for sure, hearing loss shouldn't be ignored as just a normal side effect of aging.

The connections between different parts of our bodies are not always obvious. For example, take high blood pressure. This is typically an "invisible" conditionyou don't really feel any different when it's elevated. However, internally high blood pressure can damage your organs and put you at risk for stroke, heart disease, or kidney failure. This is why discovering the presence of this condition before it does damage is so important. This is one of the reasons we have yearly physicals with our doctors.

Hearing loss should be treated the same way–proactively with annual hearing checks. Hearing loss is another "invisible" condition that is not always obvious. However, it should be considered just as important as any other health check. Untreated hearing loss has been associated with many disorders and conditions in the body. For example, it has been known to effect cognition and brain health. In fact, those with hearing loss experience a 30-40% faster decline in cognitive function compared to people with normal hearing, putting you at risk for developing dementia. This shows just how important it is to be aware of your hearing ability to address it sooner.

Continue reading to learn more about other health conditions that are connected to untreated hearing loss

# HEARING LOSS IS WIDESPREAD

Hearing health is vital to a person's overall well-being. It is estimated that 360 million people have hearing loss. That is roughly over 5% of the world's population.

Globally, this makes hearing loss the most common sensory impairment. In Canada, 20% of adults aged 19 to 79 have hearing loss. With its high prevalence in the population, it typically goes unrecognized. Invisible at first, you may not even know you're missing important aspects of communication. However, you may find yourself wanting to attend less social events, participate less in discussions at work, and be fatigued by the end of the day. The numbers also show that on average, people with hearing loss wait as long as 10 years before seeking help. Why wait? Living life to the fullest includes focusing on your hearing health. It is all within reach.

## SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS

#### Stop, breathe and listen.

Our ears are always on, just like the sounds around us. Cell phones ringing, people chatting, dogs barking, traffic rumbling, birds chirping—there's so much going on, but which of these sounds can you identify? It's important to take a moment and simply listen to the world around you. Our brain allows us to identify and interpret different sounds and to focus on what we want to hear. It can instantly recognize the voice of a loved one, or allows you to quietly read a book without recognizing the background sounds.

So despite sound being constantly on, it's our brain that decides which sounds to switch on and off! Sometimes, it doesn't work that way. Sometimes, our brain can't identify a sound because our ear can't hear it to begin with!

### How do you know if you have hearing loss? Ask yourself these questions:

- 1. Do you have to turn the volume up on the television?
- 2. Do you hear, but not necessarily understand what others are saying?
- 3. Do you have trouble following conversations in busy places?
- 4. Do you often ask people to repeat sentences?

If you've answered **YES** to one or more of the above questions, speak to us and take the first step in the right direction.

### GET THE HEARING LOSS FACTS

#### The stats don't lie: you are not alone in your hearing loss!

- An estimated 360 million people around the world are affected by hearing loss—that's about 5% of the world's population.
- Approximately 1 in every 1000 infants have hearing loss.
- Approximately 1 in 3 people over 60 have hearing loss.
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), chronic ear infections are a leading cause of hearing loss.
- Studies show that around 65% of people with hearing loss experience mild hearing loss, 30% moderate and 5% severe or profound hearing loss.
- About 1/3 of all people with hearing loss are of retirement age.
- The majority of people with hearing loss are of school-going or working age.
- Studies show that only 1 in 5 people who would benefit from a hearing aid actually use one.
- On average, people with hearing loss wait almost 10 years before they do something about it.

## DO I NEED HEARING AIDS?

If you need a hearing aid we will present all of your different options in a Hearing Aid Evaluation appointment, usually right after your hearing test results have been explained to you. Understanding the type of hearing aid you need begins with that hearing test. It tells us exactly what each patient needs a hearing aid to do.

Once we know what you need (how much amplification, how much noise suppression, what kind of features you need to succeed), we can make a device recommendation that suits your needs, your lifestyle, and your budget. The recommendation may include a hearing aid, but also other hearing loss management options such as aural rehabilitation, counselling, and auditory training.

Selecting the hearing aid itself is only part of the process. Your device will be carefully fitted for maximum comfort and performance, and finetuned to provide exactly the sound you need based on your hearing loss.



### SO YOU HAVE HEARING LOSS NOW WHAT?

Hearing loss is not uncommon and nothing to be afraid of. We're here to help you. The quicker you get an expert opinion, the better your quality of life will be. Modern hearing aid technology advances quickly with new innovations each year. These advances are making a significant difference in the lives of millions.

Nearly all hearing aids are digital and require professional fitting and programming by a hearing healthcare provider. These hearing aids offer far greater flexibility than previous hearing aid generations because the programmer can adjust them to the exact frequencies needed for each person, based on your hearing test. As the level of technology increases from basic to advanced, hearing aid features become more automatic and more dynamic to adjust quickly to any listening situation. They also allow you to hear from all directions, in all sorts of sound environments. Many of the hearing aids today are wireless, and can connect directly to your smartphone, television, and computers via Bluetooth technology. This also allows two hearing aids to communicate and operate with each other, instead of acting as two separate devices, mimicking how normal hearing ears work with the brain to process sound.

Today's hearing aids do more than just help you hear well. They are sophisticated consumer electronic devices that boast amazing technology. And yes, a side effect of hearing aids...is being able to hear! You will notice the difference!



# TYPES AND STYLES OF HEARING AIDS



#### Invisible-in-the-canal (IIC):

These discreet hearing aids are the tiniest hearing aids made. They fit very deep in the ear canal. These hearing aids are ideal for life on the go, and are a great option for people looking for a discreet solution.



In-the-ear (ITE): These are custom molded hearing aids that are easy to use for people with dexterity or vision problems. They are powerful and comfortable hearing aids allowing for all day use.



#### Completely-in-the-canal (CIC): Sleek and subtle, these hearing aids are molded to the contours

of your ear for a superior fit. These hearing aids give a natural look and hearing experience.



#### Receiver-in-thecanal (RIC): Reliable and convenient. These hearing aids are the most popular devices on the

market today, because of their size, flexibility and lightweight feel.



In-the-canal (ITC): This style of hearing aid sits in the lower portion of the outer bowl of the ear. Which makes them comfortable and easy to use. Because these hearing aids are slightly larger they have a longer battery life, they are easier to handle and have external controls.



#### Behind-the-ear (BTE): This option can fit any type of hearing loss. It follows the contour behind your ear, giving you more controls and power than any other style.

## HEARING LOSS AND RISK OF FALLS

Maintaining balance is important for all of us, and especially for older people for whom even a minor fall can mean serious injury. In addition to transmitting sound to the brain, the inner ear is also involved in helping us keep our balance. And research indicates that hearing has a definite connection to balance. It has been found that just mild hearing loss nearly triples the risk of falling. And that the risk increases an additional 140 percent for every 10 decibels of hearing loss. Researchers have explored several connections. Hearing loss, for instance, may pose a greater risk of falling because of how hard the brain needs to work while processing sound; straining to hear may take brain power away from maintaining balance.

Not hearing clearly also means you can simply miss sounds that make you aware of your surroundings. If you can't hear someone trying to warn you about an obstacle, or if you miss the sound of a crossing signal, the likelihood of falling gets higher.

## HEARING LOSS AND DEMENTIA

The connection between hearing loss and dementia is becoming more and more clear as researchers explore it.

The effort our brains put in to accomplishing the various things we need them to do is known as "cognitive load." Because the brain is responsible for translating the vibrations collected by our ears, hearing is part of that load.

Hearing loss increases cognitive load because it causes an individual to struggle in the process of understanding sounds, causing the brain to work harder. Years of straining to decode sound, researchers suggest, may eventually overwhelm the brain, opening the door to dementia.

It can be very easy for a person to allow hearing loss to discourage interaction with other people. Hearing loss sufferers can find it much easier to avoid people rather than struggle to understand what they're saying. That sort of self-imposed exile can lead to the sort of isolation dementia researchers warn against.



### HEARING LOSS AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Our ability to hear, like everything else that happens in our bodies, depends on the flow of blood through our veins and arteries. Small blood vessels in the inner ear are essential to our ability to process sound. Research indicates that those blood vessels are so sensitive that cardiovascular-related hearing loss may actually turn up even before traditional symptoms of cardiovascular disease, making hearing loss a possible indicator of a dangerous condition.

When we think about hearing, we tend to think in terms of the inner-ear mechanisms that transmit sound to the brain. But keeping your heart healthy and your blood flowing well is a good thing for your overall well-being, including your hearing.

# HEARING LOSS AND DEPRESSION

Hearing loss, social isolation, and depression are, unfortunately, all related to each other. In fact, in one study people with hearing loss were twice as likely to suffer from depression than those without it.

It might sound obvious that people who have trouble hearing get depressed about it, but there are other things to consider. For instance, many people with hearing loss don't know they have it; unless hearing loss is associated with injury, illness or noise trauma it tends to come on very gradually. Given that, it seems that someone who is already experiencing depression could have their condition worsened by hearing loss without even knowing it; the struggle to hear, and the emotional effect of that struggle, aren't necessarily noticeable. Another factor to consider is people who struggle to hear and communicate in places such as family gatherings, meetings at a coffee shop, or recreational activities, may start to withdrawal themselves from those activities. This can indirectly cause the individual to miss out on things they once loved before their hearing loss, slipping them in depression. If you or a loved one have any feelings of depression, please don't feel ashamed or embarrassed. Let us know. We are here to help.

### HEARING LOSS AND "RINGING IN THE EARS"

"Tinnitus" or "ringing in the ears" is a phantom noise heard in the head or the ears, and affects about 10-15% of people. It can take the form of buzzing, hissing, roaring, and ringing. It can have a number of causes, but it is most often related to hearing loss and stress. When the hair cells in our ears that transmit sound information to our brain is damaged due to hearing loss, the brain is not receiving sound correctly or clearly. Researchers believe that this contributes

to tinnitus. When the brain isn't receiving clear sound signals, it starts to produce its own noise to compensate. Tinnitus can vary in severity and, in cases where it is caused by environmental factors, may be treatable by simply changing your lifestyle to eliminate or mitigate certain noises. Let us know if you experience ringing and we can find a solution for you.

# HOW NOISE CAN DAMAGE YOUR INNER EAR

### In today's world, many of us tend to stuff our ears with a lot of loud noise.

Earbuds turned up too loud. Noisy work environments. Too much time in bars and restaurants where you have to shout to be heard. All these things contribute to what is known as noise-induced hearing loss.

We're all familiar with the word, "decibel." What the word actually measures is the amount of pressure a particular sound has on our hearing, how hard it hits the mechanisms of the inner ear.

A light tap on a drum doesn't move the drum head in a way that you can even see, but when you hit it like a rock drummer trying to be heard over the din of a crowd, you can see the entire drum moving on its stand; the same goes for your eardrums and every other link in the hearing chain—loud sounds push them to their limits.

And it's not just nightlife lovers and people in certain jobs who need to be careful. If you use a lawnmower, you regularly expose yourself to a prolonged engine noise beyond the 85-decibel limit recommended by hearing experts. Handyman power tools can register at more than 100 decibels.

Fortunately, there are quite a few very comfortable options out there for protecting your hearing in any number of situations. Let us show you what we recommend for your particular situation.



### INCLUDE A HEARING TEST AS PART OF YOUR ANNUAL HEALTH CHECK UP

Once you've had a hearing test, we strongly recommend it not be your last one.

Make a hearing test part of your annual health checkup. A regular relationship with our clinic will enable you to monitor your hearing over the long term. If you have hearing aids, an annual test will allow us to gradually make adjustments to your devices and recommend lifestyle changes to keep your hearing healthy.