

What Did You Say!

Complaints of hearing loss are one of the more common complaints I get in my office. Often the concerned person is not the patient, but a frustrated family member. Either many people do not realize how much their hearing has deteriorated or they simply ignore it. Unfortunately, the person does not realize how much they are missing. Hearing loss can occur at any age, but is more common as a person gets older.

Sound travels through air in the form of waves that produce a vibration in the ear. The ear is responsible to convert these vibrations into electrical energy and sending them to the brain. In the brain, they are turned into meaningful information such as language and music. The volume of sound is measured in decibels. Anything that interferes with the transmission pathway can cause a hearing loss. Hearing loss is divided into 2 types: Conductive Hearing Loss and Sensorineural Hearing Loss. Conductive loss is when the transmission is disturbed anywhere from the outer ear to the inner ear. Common causes include middle ear infections, collection of fluid in the middle ear, blockage of the outer ear, damage to the eardrum, otosclerosis, and rheumatoid arthritis. Sensorineural loss is when the transmission is disturbed anywhere from the inner ear to the brain. Common causes include age-related loss, injury caused from loud noise exposure, viruses, Meniere's disease, drugs, tumor, infections of the brain, multiple sclerosis and stroke.

Everyone should be monitored for hearing loss. If any signs of hearing loss are thought to be occurring, then you should see your doctor to have any examination of your ear and to have a hearing test. This can determine what type of hearing loss you are having and the type of treatment that may be prescribed.

The following is a simple hearing health questionnaire:

Do others complain that you watch television with the volume too high?

Do you frequently have to ask others to repeat themselves?

Do you have difficulty understanding when in groups or in noisy situations?

Do you have to sit up front in meetings or in church in order to understand?

Do you have difficulty understanding women or young children?

Do you have trouble knowing where sounds are coming from?

Are you unable to understand when someone talks to you from another room?

Have others told you that you do not seem to hear them?

Do you avoid family meetings or social situations because you "can't understand"?

Do you have ringing or other noises (tinnitus) in your ears?