

11 million people across the UK have a hearing loss- that's 1 in 6 of us, yet only 40% of those who need hearing aids have them. Untreated hearing loss can have some psychological and mental impact decreasing the quality of life. Hearing impairment is often left untreated despite our needs to communicate and be social butterflies. As an Audiologist it is very common to hear comments such as, "my hearing loss is normal for my age"; same is true for a cataract and one would act on that. It's human nature to adapt to things and as hearing losses usually progress slowly, we don't notice the gradual deterioration. Making excuses such as blaming others for their "lack" of articulation or excessive "mumbling" ... Sounds familiar?

On the 3rd of March World Hearing Day will be held. This initiative has been setup by WHO to create some awareness about the issue of hearing loss.

From busy restaurants to loud music, we do live in a noisy world and this constant tumult takes its toll on our hearing. Health and safety regulations will require employers to provide hearing protection for environments where the noise is 85 decibels or higher; which is close to the loudness of a lawn mower. The louder the noise, the faster the hearing will deteriorate. Even if the length of exposure is only a short period the unwelcome add-on of Tinnitus may be experienced in some cases. I can put my hand up as an "ex-loud music addict" and the tinnitus which followed was rather unpleasant. Unfortunately this is pretty common within the iPod generation and the age of people coming in to clinic with early onset of hearing loss has definitely lowered. The good news is that some useful hi-tech equipment can be easily accessible to reduce the risks of damaging your hearing. Things such as, foam plugs for concerts or free app measuring your daily exposure to sound through your phone.

As mentioned, untreated hearing losses impact individuals in their lives. The efforts needed to concentrate in conversation socially or at work and the withdrawing of social gathering tend to increase the risk of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, fatigue... The list goes on and on. Recent studies have also shown links between hearing loss and dementia and hearing loss with memory loss and cognitive declines (if you have not heard it, you will probably not remember it) and this is why hearing has become one priority health wise for WHO.

Checking your hearing can be done very easily through the NHS or a private audiologist. A basic check will only last a couple of minutes and will give you a baseline on your hearing so why not check your hearing as you check your vision? Being able to protect more than just your hearing, but your cognitive ability as well, is worth a discussion with your GP or an audiologist. As a patient of mine once told me "If I had known the level of improvement; how much I was missing, I would have seen to my hearing loss years ago!".

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