WHY OUR HEARING DECLINES

Age-related hearing loss, called presbycusis, is usually caused from damage to hair cells in the inner ear. It affects our ability to hear high frequency sounds, including consonants in speech.

Age isn’t the only cause or hearing loss, however. High blood pressure and diabetes have been linked with it, as has heredity. Smokers, according to a Japanese study published in March 2018, were noted to have a 60 percent greater chance of losing hearing than nonsmokers.

High volume workplace noises also play a role in hearing loss. Hearing issues are common in military veterans as well. Even occasional exposure to noise, whether it is a concert or a leaf blower, can cause long-term damage. For noises in the 85-90 decibel range such as that of a lawn mower, ear plugs are recommended by audiologists.

Exposure to all noises can add up to hearing problems, so is advisable to get a hearing test to gauge your hearing loss if you think you have a problem. Besides examining your eardrums, ear canals and cochlea, an audiologist will interview you. “I always ask people if they can hear leaves rustling on a suburban street at midnight when there is no traffic,” said Jackie Clark, immediate past president of the American Academy of Audiology. “That’s a line of demarcation of normal hearing.”

Hearing loss can lead to depression, anxiety and poor relationships, the Academy reports. It can increase your risk of dementia. When people in their 50s and 60s with hearing loss began using hearing aids, their scores improved in tests measuring working memory and processing speed, a University of Texas at El Paso study has demonstrated.

If you think you are having hearing problems, you should contact an ear, nose and throat doctor to examine your ears and diagnosis your problem. He/she will refer you to an audiologist to check your hearing and prescribe a hearing device if necessary.

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