

Living with Hearing Loss

Though endowed with a lively and passionate temperament and even fond of the distractions offered by society, I was soon obliged to seclude myself and live in solitude. Yet I could not bring myself to people: "Speak up, shout, for I am deaf." So forgive me if you ever see me withdrawing from your company, which I used to enjoy. For there can be no relaxation in human society, no refined conversations, no mutual confidences. I must live quite alone and may creep in society only as often as sheer necessity demands."

In this touching excerpt from a letter written by Beethoven to his brothers Carl and Johan, we can hear the isolation, the sadness, the passivity, and the stigma that are hearing loss. Fortunately for most people with hearing impairment now, things are not quite so bad. Were Beethoven alive today, an array of devices would offer the hope of hearing and understanding. However, we need to consider hearing loss as more than just the loss of a sense of sound reception. We need to blend the use of sensory aid with the emotional, cognitive, social and often spiritual losses that hold those with hearing problems back from experiencing life.

It takes an average of 7 years for someone with a hearing loss to explore the help available. Over 16% of those that have hearing aids, do not wear them and an even smaller percentage use assistive devices. Another 16% of people who try hearing aids, reject them. Only 60% of those wearing hearing aids are satisfied with them. Surveys show that half of all hearing aid users would like more information about how to make the most of their hearing instruments.

Why is it that people with hearing loss take as many as 7 years to seek help? Stigma is still a valid answer. Hearing loss often associated with ageing in a youth oriented society, is seen as an embarrassment. In addition to stigma and possible denial, lack of information about hearing loss and how and where to seek help is certainly high on the list of why people don't get help.

Hearing loss is one of the most prevalent chronic conditions affecting older adults. The exchange of information with others is an important aspect of everyday life. This can seriously be impaired in individuals with hearing loss. These difficulties with communication may lead to a perceived reduction in quality of life. As life expectancy increases and older adults are living longer, an increasing number of individuals will be forced to endure hearing loss during their senior years. Understanding the impact that this has on quality of life is of great importance.

There may be a tendency to dismiss hearing loss as being either unimportant or an inevitable aspect of ageing. However, with services readily available that provide hearing aids, assistive listening devices, and aural rehabilitation, a person's quality of life can be maintained and they can remain active and social.

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