Hearing Protection: Adults and Seniors

Hearing loss affects almost 38 million American adults. Although it’s a serious condition on its own, hearing loss is also associated with other conditions—including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and dementia. Adults should protect themselves from avoidable hearing damage and seek treatment if they are experiencing problems.

Noisy Jobs: Loud noise is one of the most common workplace hazards. Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a quarter of U.S. workers reported a history of noise exposure at work. Wear hearing protection at jobs where loud noise is a concern. U.S. employers are required to implement a hearing conservation program when noise exposure is at or above 85 decibels averaged over 8 working hours.

Noisy Leisure Settings: Noise in nightclubs, concert venues, stadiums, restaurants, and gyms can routinely reach unsafe levels. Not long ago, the sound level at a professional U.S. football game registered as an earthquake. Unlike occupational settings, there is currently no standard for safe listening in leisure environments. Adults can help preserve their hearing by wearing hearing protection and choosing quieter activities.

Medications: More than 200 known prescription and over-the-counter medicines on the market can cause hearing loss (called “ototoxic” medications). Some treat serious infections, cancer, and heart disease. Although there is often little choice when it comes to taking these medications, patients should consider the effects on hearing with their doctor—and make sure that their hearing and balance are being monitored during treatment.

Age-Related Hearing Loss: Aging is the most common cause of acquired hearing loss—affecting half of adults in their 70s and 80% of those 85 and older. Despite this, only about one third of people with self-reported hearing loss have ever had their hearing tested. And only 15% of those eligible for hearing aids consistently use them. Treatment can improve all aspects of life.

Learn more at www.asha.org/public and www.hearingloss.org.