

Hearing Loss is a Family Matter

Chances are good that hearing loss will affect you or someone you love, or maybe it already has. According to the Better Hearing Institute, hearing loss affects 3 in 10 people over age 60, and 1 in 6 baby boomers. As we approach the holidays, Audiologist Dr. Joan McCormack of Atlantic Hearing Care in Vinnin Square recommends that we take a moment to offer encouragement to our friends and family members to get a professional hearing evaluation and take steps to better hearing.

Hearing loss is invisible, but its effects are not. Hearing loss can tear at the fabric of family life. Communication and keeping up to speed with the latest family news is what keeps us connected, whether it is over the dinner table or on a phone call. Difficulty communicating with a spouse or parent because of untreated hearing loss can add unnecessary stress and frustration to our family relationships. It can also lead to misunderstandings and feelings of isolation on the part of the person with hearing loss.

Hearing loss usually happens gradually. Many people with hearing loss genuinely do not realize how their hearing loss impacts those around them. They may not realize how much they are missing and how everyone has adapted, often by unwittingly leaving the person with hearing loss out of the mainstream of conversation because of the effort involved. They may not acknowledge that they have stopped doing activities or seeing people they once enjoyed because they can not hear clearly.

Dr. McCormack offers these suggestions to encourage a loved one to have a hearing evaluation and to try hearing aids if they are recommended:

1. Create an awareness of the hearing problem. By not saying anything you reinforce the perception that they are functioning just fine. Gently draw their attention to when something was missed or misunderstood. Show him or her how their untreated hearing loss affects relationships with their loved ones.
2. Enlist the help of other family members or your physician to encourage getting the hearing evaluation as a first step toward better hearing.
3. Discuss why he or she is unwilling to take action and discuss their objections in a supportive way. Often people have misinformation about the process or are afraid of the image of wearing hearing aids. Demonstrate that their hearing loss shows more than any hearing aid ever could.
4. Accompany your loved on to the evaluation to understand what is involved in the process toward better hearing. Listening to a familiar voice when trying hearing aids will reinforce the benefit.
5. Be patient, supportive and maintain your sense of humor!