



The Importance of a Hearing Test

As your loved one gets older, it is important to have them seen by an Audiologist for a hearing test. Having their ears checked for excessive cerumen or ear wax is equally important. Age related hearing loss, known as presbycusis, is the gradual decline of hearing starting with the higher frequencies or “higher pitches.” This hearing loss can be worsened by the effects of diabetes, certain medications, radiation, and a history of noise exposure.

Hearing loss affects speech understanding, or the clarity of speech. A common complaint is, “I can hear you but I can’t understand what you are saying.” Hearing loss happens gradually, and we tend not to notice the drastic effect on our daily communication and social interactions. It may begin by simply misinterpreting words in conversation, having increased difficulty hearing in background noise, and the inability to have a conversation while engaged in another activity. You may notice if your loved one is reading the newspaper or watching television they don’t recognize you are speaking to them. If this is happening, there is the potential for a greater degree of hearing loss that may begin to affect cognition and social activity.

As hearing declines, your loved one may be more likely to prefer to sit alone watching television, not engage in conversation, or may become more withdrawn from activities they once enjoyed. They may develop feelings of inadequacy because they can’t hear what a grandchild is saying or what someone across the room may be talking about. They may feel like a burden asking everyone to repeat themselves, so they just don’t participate in the conversation. The amount of hearing loss may be overlooked because they can hear you when you speak right to them and have their attention. This is because they are focused and working to fill in the parts of the words and sentences they aren’t hearing. It’s comparable to squinting when you can’t see. This quickly becomes tiring for a person, and again, eventually results in them not paying attention to the conversation.

Having a hearing test by an Audiologist will ensure there is no ear wax blocking the ears and determine the degree of hearing loss. If the hearing loss is significant enough to affect activities of daily living a hearing aid or assistive device is recommended. This is important as more and more research shows a correlation between dementia and hearing loss. A person can also seem more confused if the hearing loss goes unaddressed.

Tips for Improved Communication

1. Gain the person’s attention before speaking to them by calling their name or touching their arm.
2. Speak slower and in close proximity. Eliminate or reduce background noise.
3. If the person wears a hearing aid, ensure the batteries are good and there is no ear wax or debris blocking the receivers. Having the hearing aids cleaned regularly by an Audiologist is advised.
4. Excessive cerumen or ear wax can block your ears to the point that it causes hearing loss. Having a professional look in the ears for wax is important so that a referral can be made to have it removed.