

Hear ye, hear ye!

Take part in the hearing check challenge during Better Speech and Hearing Month

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In our time of advanced technology and all things wireless, most TV watchers are familiar with the Verizon catchphrase, "Can you hear me now?"

On television the phrase refers to cell phones. In reality, hearing problems often have people asking the same thing.

Loss of hearing is a treatable health issue that is also one of the least addressed. According to the Better Hearing Institute, hearing loss affects more than 31.5 million Americans today, many under the age of 60.

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month. To bring awareness to the issue of hearing loss, the Cape Cod Hearing Center in Hyannis is joining forces with the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) in the Across America Hearing Check Challenge.

Through the challenge, Cape Cod residents of all ages are encouraged to get their hearing checked.

"It is so much more prevalent than people realize," said Dr. Theresa Cullen,

Au. D., president of the Cape Cod Hearing Center.

At the CCHC office on Barnstable Road, Cullen sees a number of patients each week with hearing problems and notes that patients coming in are not always elderly.

"We're seeing younger and younger people," said Cullen. "Everywhere you go

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people have things stuck in their ears."

While the majority of patients Cullen sees are Baby Boomers dealing with hearing loss as the result of too much noise exposure, there has been an increase in the number of patients between 29 and 40.

However, many people suffering from hearing problems are reluctant to seek treatment.

"There is still a stigma associated with hearing aids," said Cullen. "It's unfortunate because now they're so much more cosmetically appealing."

Cullen also noted that today's hearing aids, now often referred to as "personal communication assistance," are much more

technologically advanced than in the past.

"These are not like Grandpa's hearing aids any more," said Cullen, holding a tiny model hearing aid that leaves the ear canal open and can be colored to match a patient's hair.

Today's hearing aids offer improvement in processing background noise with microphones that soften background noise and help focus on forward sounds.

"Nothing eliminates it but if we can improve the signal to noise ratio, it's important," said Cullen.

Cullen marvels at how far technology has come, with programmable hearing aids that are smaller and more adaptable than larger models of the past becoming more mainstream.

Many new models have settings to allow people to attend concerts, talk on the telephone, or do other hearing-related activities.

Cullen explained that hearing loss often starts with the inability to hear high frequencies of sound.

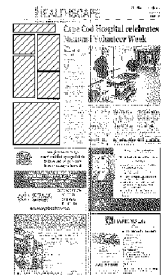
"That's where your consonants are," she said. "It affects clarity."

As hearing diminishes, it can have a profound effect on a person's quality of life. Often people with hearing loss become less social and more withdrawn.

"They disconnect from family and social functions," said Cullen.

Older people are more apt to come in for a hearing check, especially if they had parents with hearing problems.

"They've seen their par-



ents struggle,” said Cullen. “They say, ‘I don’t want to get to that point.’ They don’t want to have that experience.”

Because hearing loss is not as obvious as other health problems, it can often go unchecked and unnoticed for years.

Cullen encourages annual hearing screenings and warns parents against letting children listen to headphones at high volumes.

“If you can hear your child’s music through the headphones it’s too loud,” she said. “Hearing loss happens so gradually. It’s so insidious that people don’t even realize it’s happening.”

For more information about the Better Hearing Institute and for a hearing check quiz, visit www.hearingcheck.org.



KATHLEEN SZMIT PHOTO

HAVE YOU HEARD? – Dr. Theresa Cullen, Au. D., president of the Cape Cod Hearing Center in Hyannis, encourages people of all ages to get their hearing checked during Better Hearing and Speech Month which began May 1.

By the numbers

According to the Better Hearing Institute:

- Three in 10 people over age 60 have hearing loss.
- One in 6 baby boomers (ages 41 to 59) have a hearing problem
- One in 14 Generation X-ers (ages 29 to 40) already have hearing loss.
- At least 1.4 million children (18 and younger) have hearing problems
- It is estimated that three in 1,000 infants are born with serious to profound hearing loss.

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