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Baby boomers, hearing loss, hearing devices

More baby boomers are showing signs of hearing loss. More than 31.5 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. That's about one in 10 individuals. It may reach 44 million by 2030. Much of that looming surge is a baby-boomer phenomenon.

Among Americans ages 46 to 64, about 15 percent already have hearing problems, according to a survey by the Better Hearing Institute. Two out of three people with hearing loss are below retirement age. Sixty percent of people with hearing loss are male.

Sadly, only 12 percent of physicians today ask patients, if they have any hearing problems, which may explain why only one in five people who could benefit from hearing devices currently wear them.

"It is important to educate physicians about the need to assess their patients' hearing as

well as introduce them to the technology available to help their patients with hearing loss," Dr. Chip Hahn, audiologist at Cardinal Hill of Northern Kentucky said.

According to Dr. Hahn: "It is also important for patients to feel comfortable discussing concerns about their hearing. Too often it is assumed that hearing loss is just a sign of aging and that is simply not true," as the statistics from the Better Hearing Institute survey above reveal.

Hearing loss doesn't just affect hearing. Hearing loss is associated with short-term memory loss. According to a recent study at Brandeis University, older adults with mild to moderate hearing loss expended so much cognitive energy on trying to hear accurately that it diminished their ability to remember a short word list. As a result, their cognitive functioning was poorer than those individuals

of the same age that had good hearing.

Hearing loss leads to stress and fatigue because it requires so much effort to listen to what someone is saying - particularly in a noisy setting. The National Council on Aging (NCOA) reported that hearing loss in older persons can have a significant negative impact on quality of life.

In the NCOA's survey of 2,300 hearing-impaired adults, age 50 or older, those with untreated hearing loss were more likely to report depression, anxiety, and paranoia and less likely to participate in organized activities, compared to those who wore hearing aids.

If those problems are not enough to motivate you to do something about your hearing problem, consider this: People with untreated hearing loss make, on average, up to \$12,000 per year less than their counterparts who have treated their hearing loss



with hearing aids. Wearing hearing aids mitigates the loss in earnings about 50 percent.

But progress is being made on many fronts.

Advances in digital technology have dramatically improved hearing aids - they are smaller than ever with far better sound quality. Top-of-the-line models feature "directional" or "high definition" hearing. These devices use two microphones and an algorithm to enhance sound coming from the front (the person you are talking to), while tuning down sound coming from behind (the rest of the noisy party).

The creation of devices using Bluetooth communication technology can turn select hearing aids into wireless, hands-free headsets. A promising advancement related

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