Risk Factors for Hearing Loss

Your ears are incredibly effective but delicate sensory organs. They are susceptible to damage from, among other things, chronic diseases, medications and trauma. Recent studies have shown how closely linked hearing loss is to many different medical conditions. You are at increased risk of hearing loss if any of the following apply to you:

- **Age** – 29% of Australians aged 51-60 years have a hearing loss, rising to 66% in those over 60
- **Diabetes** – 2x greater incidence for ages 20-69
- **Obesity** – 2x greater incidence in men, 1.3 in women
- **Smoking**, including being exposed to second hand smoke – 2x greater incidence
- **Cardiovascular disease**, including hypertension
- **Usage of certain medications**, including aspirin, ibuprofen, aminoglycoside antibiotics, loop diuretics and chemotherapy drugs can cause hearing loss
- **Balance issues**, including dizziness
- **Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)**
- **Exposure to high noise levels**
- **Head injuries**
- **Family history of hearing loss**
- **History of ear infections or ear surgery**

Complications of hearing loss

Ears collect and transmit sound while the brain processes it. When patients have a hearing loss they lose sound quality. Their brain can compensate to a certain degree but this requires substantial processing power. This can lead to several serious complications, including:

- **Depression**
- **Social withdrawal and isolation**
- **Non-compliance with medical advice**, including taking medications incorrectly
- **Difficulties in the workplace**
- **Mental exhaustion due to the effort required to understand other people**
- **Increased risk of dementia**
- **Increased falls risk - 3x greater incidence**
- **Increased risk of hospitalization**
- **Decreased overall Quality of Life**, which hearing aids have been shown to effectively improve

Economic cost of hearing loss

- Hearing loss costs the Australian economy $11.75 billion
- Treating hearing loss costs $674 million, less than 6% of its economic cost
- The burden of disease caused by hearing loss alone accounts for 3.8% of the total burden of disease and costs an estimated additional $11.3 billion

Signs patients should see an audiologist

- Difficulty picking out words in background noise
- Speaking loudly and having difficulty understanding and responding to people
- Feeling like they have to concentrate to understand other people
- Non-compliance with medical advice
- Having a history of falls or having problems with balance or dizziness
- Having depression, worry or anxiety, especially related to socialising
- Buzzing or ringing in the ears
- Having a history of exposure to loud noises
- Patient feels like everybody, especially women and children, mumble
- Having one or more of the risk factors for hearing loss
- You are concerned about their risk of future hearing loss due to risky hearing behaviours

Is your patient a pensioner?

If your patient is an Australian Pensioner they may qualify for free hearing services. To find out if they can access free hearing services you or they can simply Freecall 1800 888 196 with their Australian Pensioner card handy and we can check their eligibility and register them straight away. We will then send you a form to sign, confirming they require hearing services. All you need to do is return the form to us and they become eligible.

Want more information?

Our website now has a dedicated section for professionals where you can refer patients and access information and studies related to hearing and health, as well as review new hearing technologies and how they may interact with other medical interventions.

www.hearingandaudiology.com.au
References:


