

Baby Boomers in denial about their hearing loss new survey shows



“Honey, I can’t hear you.” Five of the hardest words Jim Cudo ever had to speak. Deep down he had known for years about his hearing loss, but when he had to tell his 10 year-old granddaughter he couldn’t hear her words, he knew it was time to take action.

Jim is not alone. A new study from Applied Research shows older Americans are in denial about their hearing loss and the associated social costs. Applied surveyed 250 older Americans aged 50 to 75 as well as 250 adults who had parents in that same age bracket. What they found may surprise you.

Denial

When asked about their hearing, 72 percent of older Americans say their hearing is average or better. Not so, say their children, most of whom report having suggested their parents get their hearing tested (70 percent have prodded their father and 64 percent their mother). Clearly, older Americans are in denial about their hearing loss. “It is something I should have taken care of years ago and didn’t. It was a choice that was wrong on my part,” says Cudo.

Jim’s wife, Linda, adds “His hearing was not what it should have been for the past 6 or 7 years. Of course, you always find an excuse for it. Maybe he wasn’t paying attention to me or perhaps he was in a different room. Sometimes

it’s easier to make an excuse than to really look at what the real cause is.”

Stigma

With the negative impact of hearing loss so high, why do people avoid the solution? Cost is a major factor, but pride is often mentioned. One third fear that wearing a hearing aid will “look awkward” and 29 percent say it will “make them look old.”

“You look at other people with hearing aids and say, ‘I’m not going to wear that,’” says Jim. “It was a man thing.” Linda agrees, adding “We’re all a little bit vain. We don’t want everybody to see that we have hearing aids.”

Older American Hearing Study

Applied Research surveyed 250 Americans aged 50 to 75 years and 250 children of older Americans.

Key findings:

- The majority of “Boomers” believe their hearing is better than average, while their spouse and children wish they would have their hearing tested.
- The majority of “Boomers” do not currently use nor are they considering a hearing device.
- There is a significant disconnect between “Boomers” and their children about the consequences of their hearing loss.
- Stigmas still discourage those with hearing loss from considering hearing devices.

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Addressing Your Own Hearing Loss

There are different types of hearing loss that are experienced to various degrees and due to several causes. But the symptoms of hearing loss are basically the same. If you think you could have a hearing loss, answering these questions is the right place to start:

- Do people comment that your TV or radio is too loud?
- Have you missed visits and calls from people because you didn't hear the doorbell or telephone ringing?
- Do you have trouble following conversations in crowded or noisy settings?
- Do people seem to mumble and not speak clearly?
- Do people tell you that you speak too loudly?
- Do you frequently ask people to repeat themselves?
- Do your friends and family suggest that you have a hearing problem?
- Do you have a difficult time understanding the words of popular songs when listening to the radio?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, there is a chance that you may have some degree of hearing loss. We urge you to have a hearing test conducted by a hearing health care professional.

Not Your Grandfather's Hearing Aid

The social cost of hearing loss is devastating for older Americans. But it need not be that way. Advances in hearing technology are making it easier than ever to address their loss in a cost-effective, unobtrusive way.

Hearing aid technology has come a long way since the days of clunky, uncomfortable devices. Jim Cudo avoided hearing aids for years because he thought hearing devices would make him look weak, or would be uncomfortable to wear.

Now Jim has to remind himself to take them off before he takes a shower or goes to bed. He only wishes he hadn't waited so long.

Jim wears the Siemens Life™ 700, a sleek behind-the-ear device that most of his friends fail to notice he is wearing. Today's behind-the-ear hearing aids, or BTE's, deliver impeccable sound quality from small, artistically designed instruments. Siemens fully automated technology means that Jim hardly ever has to adjust his hearing aids

when entering new environments—his hearing aids adjust automatically.

With its small size, ultra-thin tubing and ergonomic housing, Siemens Life is easy for Jim to wear and hard for his friends to detect—making it a great solution for self-conscious wearers. Siemens Life also offers wearers the benefit of wireless connectivity with electronic devices. Through the use of an optional Tek® wireless enhancement system, wearers can stream sound from MP3 players, televisions, and other audio sources directly to their hearing instruments.

I Can Hear You Again!

"When Jim got his hearing aids he started hearing things that he hadn't heard for years," says Linda. "He could hear the wheels on the shopping cart or the birds on our walks. It made a huge difference to him."

As for Jim, he was thrilled. "I don't care if you have six grandchildren or just one, they are absolutely wonderful. And hearing my granddaughter say 'papa, you can hear me again' was worth the world to me."

Helping a Loved One with Hearing Loss

Hearing loss affects a great number of people around the world. And it affects them in a variety of ways. Over time, hearing loss can lead to anxiety, depression and loneliness. Leaving hearing loss untreated can turn a physical condition into a psychological one. This is why it is so important to seek a solution promptly.

If you know a friend or loved one who has trouble participating in group conversations, seems to be speaking loudly without reason, or understanding simple conversation, it is important to share your concerns with them and urge them to see a hearing professional.

There are a number of concerns and insecurities that accompany hearing loss, so being supportive and encouraging is the best way to care for someone with hearing loss. Helping them understand the reality of their hearing loss and the effect it is having on their personal relationships is the first step toward helping them find a solution.

For information on hearing loss and hearing loss solutions, please visit www.usa.siemens.com/hearing