



Health Options

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Test your hearing via phone during free screening period

Your spouse tells you that your listening skills are less than desirable. Maybe it's your hearing. Of course, it could be a little of both, but knowing if your hearing has become compromised is important.

QUESTION: Why get your hearing tested?

ANSWER: Hearing loss can come on gradually and seriously compromise social interactions and overall quality of life. An estimated 36 million Americans have hearing loss, yet about half of them have never been tested. Research now shows that identifying hearing loss early is more likely to provide successful options to help manage a progressive loss of hearing that can develop with age.

Q: How can you get your hearing tested?

A: At least until June 15, the National Hearing Test is available free of charge and is conveniently conducted via telephone. It takes only about 10 minutes.

With funding from the U.S. National Institutes of Health, this screening test was developed by Communication Disorders Technology Inc. in partnership with Indiana University and the VU Medical Center in Amsterdam. It has been tested for accuracy and serves as a good screening tool to assess the need to seek professional as-

essment by an audiologist.

Q: How does the National Hearing Test work?

A: During the time that the test is free, simply call 866-223-7575 and follow the directions. Use a land-line phone with a number pad separate from the handset. The test may not be valid if taken with a cellphone. If you are reading this after the free period, go to www.nationalhearingtest.org to fill out a short questionnaire and pay \$8 for the test.

During the test, over a background of white noise, you listen to a voice speaking sequences of three numbers, such as 3-5-1. You indicate the numbers you heard by pressing them on the telephone keypad. As you go through the process with each ear separately, the volume of the three spoken digits declines until you can't decipher what you heard. The volume then increases and decreases to determine your hearing limit or threshold.

Q: What causes hearing loss?

A: Hearing loss often is associated with aging, although some people retain good hearing throughout life. Genetic makeup definitely plays a role, and there is some evidence that a healthful diet may help to preserve hearing.

A major cause of hearing loss in

many people is excessive exposure to loud noises over time. This can come from many sources such as lengthy exposure to occupational noise from machinery or even too much loud music. The effects gradually accumulate over time, making them relatively unnoticeable until hearing is seriously impaired.

Excessive headphone use at high volumes has been implicated as a cause of hearing loss. Some evidence suggests that loud music during exercise may be more damaging because there is reduced blood flow to the ears due to shunting of blood to meet high muscle demand.

Q: How can hearing loss be prevented?

A: The most important action is to avoid excessive exposure to loud noise, even if it is enjoyable.

When exposure is unavoidable, consider using noise-suppressing earplugs that are available in drug stores.

Q: What's new for managing hearing loss?

A: There are some new Bluetooth hearing devices that work with smartphone apps and allow users to make their own adjustments. Overall, hearing aid quality is improving and prices are dropping.

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