

# JACKSON COUNTY AUDIOLOGY

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## Tragedy: Untreated Hearing Loss

Tragedy is occurring in our communities. Our neighbors in America who suffer from hearing loss do not get help. 78% of Americans with a hearing loss do not get treatment. How could this happen in the United States, which prides itself on the use of high technology and boasts of the greatest health care system in the world?

People who are hard of hearing are often reluctant to get help. It is hard to take that first step and admit needing help for hearing. Those with hearing loss need hearing aids and they also need help to learn how to use them. Once that is done, the majority of people find that their hearing aids turn their world on every day and let them connect with the people they love, hear music and the birds, and do their jobs. Without getting treatment for hearing loss their lives would be totally different and quite limited.

Hearing loss most often results from damage to nerves in the inner ear. This type of loss is called sensorineural. It is usually permanent and not treatable by medication or surgery. Hearing aids are the treatment of choice for people who have sensorineural (nerve) hearing loss and hearing aids provide substantial benefit in daily life for millions of Americans with this type of loss. Technology has improved enormously in recent years and hearing aids are very high tech! Unfortunately, however, many still go without treatment because of vanity, denial, unwillingness to make payment for hearing aids a priority, and non-acknowledgment of the true effects of hearing loss on themselves and their families.

The effect of untreated hearing loss takes a terrible toll on people's lives: missed conversations with a spouse, the lost punch line of a friend's joke, the embarrassment at misunderstanding your colleague's complement, the empty feeling when your sister says "never mind" instead of repeating, your family's avoidance of all but the most essential conversations with you because it's so much effort, missing that sweet "I love you" whispered by your child or grandchild. These things can add up to being left out, feeling not good about yourself, wanting to retreat, feeling sad and lonely, feeling anxious and insecure, losing your edge, and not being able to do your best.

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Hearing loss is not normal-not for anyone, not even for older Americans. It's not just another of the inescapable indignities that people over 55 must endure for which there is no hope. There's help for hearing and if you have a hearing loss, treatment will make your life better. Take the steps you need to get help for hearing and save yourself from the isolation and heartbreak of limited communication that results from hearing loss.

There is a cruel myth that untreated hearing loss is a harmless condition. Those with hearing loss may not bleed but they hurt plenty. And so do their families. When communication breaks down as a result of hearing loss the whole family suffers. People with hearing loss say, "I'm getting by." They may be, but often the family is not. Breakdowns in communication and the extra layer of effort on conversations day after day creates a strain on close relationships. Getting treatment will make your family's life easier and more pleasant. People who have a hearing loss also need to think about the well being of their families.

The good news is that treatment for hearing loss works! If you have a hearing loss, go get help, then pass the news on and encourage someone else to get help. With that approach that awful national statistic of 78% not getting help for hearing can be reduced.

*Courtesy of Interactive Therapeutics, Inc.*

*References: Hearing Industries Association (HIA): Hearing Industries Association Statistical Report (2001). Washington, DC: HIA.*

*Kochkin, S. & Rogin, C. (January, 2000). Quantifying the Obvious: The impact of hearing instruments on quality of life, Hearing Review, 7(1), pp. 6-34*