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**Better Hearing and Speech Month**

When we think of May, we conjure up images of sunshine, green grass, and spring flowers. The last thing you think of are hearing aids, right?

Well, you should, because May is Better Hearing and Speech Month. This annual event raises awareness about communication disorders and promotes treatment that can improve the quality of life for those who experience problems with hearing, speaking and understanding.

There are lots of reasons why you should listen to this message – especially if you can't hear it too well!

You may be wondering why Better Hearing and Speech Month is so important. The reasons are fairly obvious, but this may be a good time to reiterate them: Hearing loss is the third most prevalent but treatable condition among seniors, behind arthritis and hyper-tension.

In fact, 3 in 10 people over 60 are hearing impaired. Additionally, 1 in 6 baby boomers (ages 41-59); 1 in 14 of those who are 29 to 40; and at least 1.4 million children,

have hearing loss. All in all, an estimated 36 million people in this country have hearing problems, and millions of them suffer – literally – in silence because their condition remains undetected, untreated, or both; studies show that while 95 percent of people with hearing loss can be helped by hearing aids, only 23 percent currently use them.

**Still not convinced to make this a better month for your hearing?**

Love your hearing. If you are one of those people who need an extra dose of persuasion because a) you don't



believe you have a hearing problem or b) you don't want to wear hearing aids because you think they'd make you look old, read on.

If everyone around you has to shout at you and you have to strain to hear them, then chances are you do have hearing loss, whether you want to admit it or not. If that's the case, there is absolutely nothing to feel ashamed of because – as above numbers demonstrate – you are far from alone.

Now, what if you don't want to get fitted with hearing aids because you believe – mistakenly, of course – that they will make you look older? While cosmetic considerations should never override health benefits, let us reassure you that modern, state-of-the art hearing aid technology is tiny and hardly visible. So that's another argument that bites the dust.

Think about it this way: if you had vision problems that impacted your daily activities, would you refuse to wear glasses because they made you look old?

The only reason that may hold some validity is that the cost of hearing aids is high – between \$1000 and \$5000 per hearing aid, depending on the model. Yes, that's a problem, especially since these devices are not covered by Medicare or most private insurance plans, and the only relief, the Hearing Aids Tax Credit, is still languishing in Congress.

For persons who need hearing aids but can't afford them it may be worth your time to seek financial aid to defray the costs through their state and local departments of social services, or fraternal organizations like the Kiwanis and Lions Club International. For a comprehensive list of national and state

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organizations offering financial assistance for hearing aids, request Healthy Hearing's free financial guide to hearing aids.

**Here's more...**

If you are still a fence sitter, consider this: Numerous studies have repeatedly shown that untreated hearing loss can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, sadness, and depression. It can also endanger your safety, because you are not able to hear – and react to – sounds of impending danger, such as fire alarms or oncoming traffic.

On the positive side, once you get fitted with hearing aids, allowing you to actively participate in conversations and other activities, your overall quality of life will improve.

Not only that, but BHI's survey shows that people who ignore their hearing problems collectively lose a staggering \$100 billion a year in earnings. But, research indicates, income loss can be cut in half by wearing hearing aids.

Think about it: quality of life, safety, and earning power – all of them can be boosted by hearing amplification.

**Hearing aids to the rescue**

Forget the "no pain, no gain" premise: A hearing test conducted by a certified and licensed professional is painless.

Yet, it is essential not only for detecting the level of your hearing loss, but also for fitting you with the most suitable

hearing aids for your ears.

We can't stress it enough: hearing loss is a treatable condition and hearing aids are absolutely crucial to your well-being and safety. While nothing can replace these devices, there are additional steps you can take to protect your hearing – in addition to amplification, NOT instead of it:

- Avoid prolonged exposure to loud noise, which is defined as sounds louder than 85 decibels. If working in a noisy environment, wear earplugs or other protective gear. While you're at it, keep the volume down on your iPod or another personal audio system, or invest into high-quality noise-cancellation headphones.

- Stop smoking. It's harmful to your hearing, and toxic to all the other organs in your body.

- If you are overweight, try to shed those extra pounds with diet and exercise.

- If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, or suspect you might have it, get tested and treated immediately, since there is correlation between this disease and hearing loss.

There you have it: a multitude of reasons why you should head to your nearest hearing professional without delay. That's a good advice for May, and the other eleven months of the year!

*Submitted by  
Tracie Edwards,  
The Hearing Aid Shop*

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### No Cola for 2012 Either?

by Matilda Charles  
Those in the know are already predicting what will happen with our Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in 2012. They're consulting charts and graphics, sharpening their pencils and guesstimating. At this point there's good and bad news, assuming the experts are correct.

The good: We'll likely get an increase of 1.1 percent to 1.2 percent, the first increase since 2009.

The bad: All of it likely will be eaten up by increases in Medicare Part B, which is deducted from our Social Security checks before we receive them.

On the other hand, if the Part B increase is larger than the Social Security increase, they won't take the difference out of our checks.

Supposedly when

consumer prices go up, so does our monthly check. A tiny increase apparently means our daily costs haven't gone up much.

For those who haven't applied for Social Security yet: If you take Social Security before your Normal Retirement Age, you get dinged for the money you make. You are penalized \$1 for every \$2 you make above \$14,160. That goes up to \$1 for every \$3 above \$37,680. Income from pensions, capital gains and annuities is not counted.

Still, if you're "under age" and still working, yet you want to collect Social Security, do the calculations carefully. Call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to have it do the calculations as well. This is no time to be wrong. Remember, too, that you'll pay taxes on Social Security if your income exceeds a certain amount: \$25,000 if you're single, and \$32,000 if you

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file jointly. The COLA figures for 2012 will be finalized in October. Cross your fingers.

Matilda Charles regrets that she cannot personally answer reader questions, but will incorporate them into her column whenever possible. Write to her in care of King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475, or send e-mail to [columnreply@gmail.com](mailto:columnreply@gmail.com).

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loss of memory, confusion and cognitive problems when they're discharged from the hospital.

The National Institute of Aging commissioned a study on this phenomenon, and it was completed by the Northwestern university Feinberg School of Medicine.

Two hundred seniors age 70-plus who had no previous cognitive or dementia issues were given a Mini-Mental Status Examination upon release from the hospital. This 30 question test only

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### Confusion After Hospital Stay

by Matilda Charles  
Anyone who's been in the hospital can remember the feeling of unreality that comes from the noises and sleep interruptions in that environment, not to mention feeling unwell. And going home doesn't automatically make everything fine again: Many seniors experience

takes a few minutes to administer, and checks for things such as orientation to time and place, calculation, attention and recall. The patient is asked to repeat three words, tell time, know the day of the week, spell a word backward and copy a figure with pencil and paper.

Nearly one-third of those senior patients being released from the hospital had low cognition scores. This means that seniors coming out of the hospital might not understand the instructions they're given for medications and self-care.

Tested again one month later, their scores had risen considerably for things like reading, writing, calculations and comprehension.

One conclusion of the study was that "patient self-management" training - teaching the patient about his or her medications and care - should be handled later

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rather than at the time the patient is being sent home. Another conclusion was that doctors and family (and I'd add "friends") need to step up, be aware of the phenomenon and give assistance - or at least arrange for it.

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### The Eldred Senior Center is holding an Open House as it celebrates "Senior America Day"

In celebration of "Senior America Day", the Eldred Senior Center will hold an Open House on Sunday, May 15th from 1:00 pm until 5:00 pm. All retirees (60 or older) are invited to the center for live entertainment by "Darwin and Company", refreshments and door prizes. Come join the celebration! The Eldred Senior Center would like

to be a part of your retired life. The center is located on 169 Main Street in Eldred, and offers a variety of activities from: live performances, Gourmet Weight Wise, walking for fitness, Wii Bowling, Euchre, various card games, free blood pressure, blood sugar screenings and APPRISE counseling (Medical insurance). We also serve great lunches with suggested donations. This is a great place to meet other retirees and spend some time relaxing and enjoying the company of others. Stop in and have a cup of coffee. You are always

welcome at the Eldred Senior Center. If you would like more information, please call: Charlotte Schweikart, center director, 169 Main Street, Eldred, PA 16731, (814) 225-4752.

### Veterans Post

by Freddy Grove  
Little-Known Benefit Aids Some Elderly Vets  
The Aid and Attendance Pension isn't a widely known veterans benefit. It provides money to vets who need help with daily living skills such as dressing themselves, or if they are housebound. A doctor must sign a form stating these facts.

To qualify for the A&A Pension, you must be a veteran age 65 or older, or permanently disabled, who served for at least 90 days, and one of those days must have been during a wartime period. After September 1980, you must have served 24 months.

You also must have a limited income, and that includes income from a spouse or dependents. You can exclude income such as Supplemental Security Income. If you already receive a service-connected disability benefit, you don't qualify for this money too. (You'll

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get the one that pays more.)

Unfortunately, there are groups trying to take advantage of veterans. They give "free" seminars on the A&A benefits and offer to help file the paperwork. Their "free" service isn't free, and once you sign their contract, you'll get a call asking for money before they'll file your claim. They'll also pressure you to buy investments such as trusts and annuities with your money, especially if you get a retroactive lump sum.

Bottom line: If you're a member of one of the veterans service organizations, you'll have access to a Veterans Service Officer. Use him or her to file your

paperwork. If you're not in one of those groups, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs (1-800-827-1000) and ask for VA Form 21-526, Veteran's Application for Compensation and/or Pension, or go online to download the forms. Take care to provide all the documentation they ask for.

support group at 10 a.m. May 11 at the hospital's main conference room. New and existing patients and their families and caregivers are welcome to attend. For more information, call 814-274-9301, ext. 1436.

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Write to Freddy Groves in care of King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475, or send e-mail to columreply@gmail.com.

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### Are You From Port Allegany?

60 plus in years? Come join us in celebrating, "Older American Month", Sunday, May 22, 2011 from noon - 3 p.m. Live music by Bruce Inglehart. Free luncheon, beef on weck, salads, baked beans, cake and more. Come see what you've been missing! Port Allegany Senior Center, 216 North Main Street, Port Allegany, PA. 814-642-2101.

### CCMH Alzheimer's Support Group To Meet

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