

**Need more information about hearing loss or hearing aids?
Contact: Jonell Block, Doctor of Audiology
Audiology Northwest, P.S.
(509) 994-4395**

The Link Between Better Hearing and Better Life – Known but Often Ignored

*Healthy Hearing Staff Writer (<http://www.healthyhearing.com>)
2/4/2008*

When Helen Keller (June 27, 1880 – June 1, 1968), an American author and activist who was both blind and deaf, was asked whether she considered vision or hearing more important, she replied:

"The problems of deafness are deeper and more complex, if not more important, than those of blindness. Deafness is a much worse misfortune. For it means the loss of the most vital stimulus--the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of man."

Helen knew from her own experience that the human sense of hearing represents the primary cognitive window into life itself. "Blindness cuts us off from things," she once said, "but deafness cuts us off from people. To be cut off from hearing (people) is to be isolated indeed."

In her advancing years, Helen concluded in a letter to a friend: "After a lifetime in silence and darkness, to be deaf is a greater affliction than to be blind...Hearing is the soul of knowledge and information of a high order. To be cut off from hearing is to be isolated indeed."

Many years later Helen's words still resonate with millions of people who suffer from hearing disability. A sense of loss and isolation they feel on daily basis goes to prove that psychological and social effects of hearing loss should not be ignored or underestimated.

But very often they are.

The Three Stages of Hearing Loss

"Few chronic illnesses are as insidious and difficult to detect yet striking in their effects on our psychological and social well-being as the uncorrected loss of hearing," says Dr. Max Chartrand, adjunct professor of Behavioral Medicine at Northcentral University in Prescott Valley, AZ.

Dr. Chartrand, who is also managing director for [DigiCare Hearing Research](#) and Rehabilitation in Colorado City, CO, is himself profoundly deaf and utilizes a cochlear implant and assistive communication devices, which give him a unique insight into the challenges faced by others with similar disabilities.

He says that most people who suffer from hearing loss pass through three stages of impairment: mild, moderate and severe, each one characterized by its own set of distinct symptoms.

The most transient stage, mild hearing loss, is so subtle that neither the sufferer nor his family may realize what is going on. "This is the stage where resistance to hearing help begins to build, but the individual must be encouraged to have a hearing test and receive amplification and/or clinical intervention," Dr. Chartrand says. "Studies show that when a loss is corrected at this early stage, basic hearing functions remain within the normal range."

During the second stage, when moderate hearing loss occurs, "people can experience growing frustration and uncertainty," he notes. "Even in cases where one is compensating well on the outside, the internal emotional turmoil and feelings of insecurity may lead to a gradual withdrawal from social relationships and other activities."

The third phase, the severe hearing loss, can take a great toll on the sufferers' lives, isolating them from their families, friends and social networks, and plunging them into depression. "They may feel trapped in a hostile world, fending against what they perceive as disrespect and ridicule," Dr. Chartrand says.

Helen's Lessons

Many people, Dr. Chartrand says, tend to ignore not only subtle nuances that take them from one stage to another, but also the available treatment options, even though early intervention can forestall or diminish the effects the disability will have on physical and mental health. "It is human nature to put off seeking help," Dr. Chartrand says. "Consequently, mild hearing loss in the very young can lead to delayed speech development and learning disabilities. For older adults, memory and cognitive abilities may be affected so that some mild Alzheimer's cases may actually be uncorrected hearing loss. For all ages, realizing that hearing loss affects more than just simple communication but also our relationships and economic potential, helps us understand that seeking help early rather than late is the wise course. In this day and age it is unnecessary to suffer these effects upon one's life."

During Helen Keller's lifetime hearing technology was not as advanced as it is today, and yet she appreciated so much the freedom and intellectual stimulation of the human word. That is one lesson we can all draw from her.

"When informed people everywhere start to realize how critical the sense of hearing is to one's quality of life and well-being, they will begin to take advantage of the wonderful hearing solutions awaiting them in every community," Dr. Chartrand says. "Then, their lives can be enjoyed to the fullest."