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Why is it so important to get routine hearing tests if I have diabetes?

Research shows that people with diabetes are about twice as likely to develop hearing loss.

Yet hearing tests are frequently overlooked in routine diabetes care. In fact, some experts believe that hearing loss may be an under-recognized complication of diabetes. <http://ow.ly/DuVyB>

A meta-analysis of 13 different studies found that younger people with diabetes were at an even greater risk of hearing loss. Those with diabetes who were older than 60 were 1.58 times more likely to have hearing loss. But the risk jumped to 2.61 times higher for those 60 and younger. <http://ow.ly/DpXDv>

Another study, by researchers at Henry Ford Hospital, found that women between the ages of 60 and 75 with well-controlled diabetes had better hearing than women whose diabetes was poorly controlled, shedding light on the importance of keeping diabetes under control to maintain healthy hearing. <http://ow.ly/DCB8K>

Still another study, of patients from a large primary care clinic in the United Kingdom, found that hearing loss is prevalent among people with diabetes and has a strong association with peripheral neuropathy. The hearing loss group in that study had almost twice the rate of at-risk feet. <http://ow.ly/KBYFd>

BHI strongly encourages people with diabetes to include regular hearing tests as part of their routine diabetes care. Unrecognized and/or unaddressed hearing loss can interfere with good diabetes management by posing a barrier to good communications between people with diabetes and their doctors. What's more, untreated hearing loss is often associated with other significant physical, mental, and emotional health conditions.

To help you take the first step, BHI has a free, quick, and confidential online [hearing check](#). Anyone can take the confidential online survey to determine if they need a comprehensive hearing test by a hearing healthcare professional.

Research shows that when people address hearing loss, their quality of life often improves. Eight out of 10 hearing aid users, in fact, say they're satisfied with the changes that have occurred in their lives due to their hearing aids—from how they feel about themselves to the positive changes they see in their relationships, social interactions, and work lives.

5 Habits for Healthier Hearing for People with Diabetes

To help protect your hearing, be sure to follow these five healthy habits:

1. Get a thorough hearing exam every year and watch for signs of hearing loss. You do it for your eyes. Now do it for your ears. Be sure to see a hearing healthcare professional every year for a thorough hearing examination. If you notice a change in your ability to hear under certain conditions—like at a restaurant or on a conference call—go sooner. And share the information with your primary care physician and endocrinologist.
2. Use hearing aids, if recommended. People often compensate for hearing difficulty by turning up the volume to unhealthy levels, which in turn can cause further hearing damage. While hearing loss is not reversible, today's hearing aids can dramatically enhance your ability to hear and engage with others—which can make a tremendous difference in your overall quality of life. Hearing aid technology has advanced radically in recent years. Many hearing aids are virtually invisible, sitting discreetly and comfortably inside the ear canal. They adjust to all kinds of noise environments and pick up sound from all directions. Best of all, many are wireless. Today's hearing aids can stream sound directly from your smartphone, home entertainment system, and other electronics directly into the hearing aid itself—at volumes just right for you. Some are even waterproof.
3. Keep your blood sugar under control. Just as your heart, eye, and nerve health are affected by your blood sugar levels, your hearing health may be as well. Work with your doctor to monitor your blood sugar and take appropriate medicines as prescribed.
4. Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Even for people without diabetes, a healthy lifestyle benefits hearing health. Not smoking, exercising, and maintaining a healthy diet all support your ability to hear. In fact, studies show that smoking and obesity may increase the risk of hearing loss, while regular physical activity seems to help protect against it. <http://ow.ly/DbkDZ>; <http://ow.ly/DbkT9>; <http://ow.ly/Dbldc>
5. Use ear protection. Everyone is at risk of noise-induced hearing loss. But using ear protection is one of the best—and simplest—things you can do to preserve your hearing. Carry disposable earplugs with you, especially when you know you'll be somewhere noisy. Use appropriate ear protection in loud work environments. Keep the volume on smartphones and other electronics low. Limit your use of headphones and ear buds. And get in the habit of quickly plugging your ears with your fingers and walking away if a loud noise takes you by surprise. Most of all, limit your time in noisy environments.