

EAR, NOSE, THROAT & ALLERGY CENTER
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AUDITORY DEPRIVATION

Hearing loss is often gradual and, therefore, something that you adapt to. You may not notice it for months, even years. But slowly, the hearing apparatus that nature provided does wear out for many as we grow older and it's simply part of the aging process. Many individuals with hearing impairment wait many years before they try hearing aids. They have gone for a long time without stimulation to the ear, and their ability to understand speech is often poor. Auditory deprivation refers to a person's lack of adequate hearing stimulation.

There's a growing collection of detailed studies that demonstrate, clinically, that people with hearing loss do better addressing the limitation when they act quickly. In other words, the first time the family tells you to turn down the TV, it's time for a hearing test.

The most common cause is simple. The person with the hearing loss chooses not to treat their hearing loss with amplification (hearing aids). When no action is taken and the nerves of the hearing mechanism aren't used, they become deprived of stimulation and slowly become weakened.

When the hearing nerves and the areas of the brain responsible for hearing are deprived of sound, they atrophy, or weaken. Not only do the nerves of hearing weaken over time, but the hearing centers of the brain also tend to weaken. In other words, the hearing centers in the brain no longer receive and process hearing from the ear, which can lead to irreversible hearing loss, even with a hearing aide.

Another cause of auditory deprivation is single-ear hearing aid use. This asymmetrical setup causes one ear to take on more of the listening activity than the other, thus, weakening the unaided ear over time.

You may save some money by purchasing a single hearing aid rather than a pair, but you are depriving one ear from sound and causing the nerves on that ear to slowly weaken. Bottom line? Over time, that unaided ear is going to lose more and more functionality and when you do get around to buying a pair of hearing aids or adding a second hearing aid, the unaided ear will have a harder time adapting to sound.

The key to hearing better longer is to keep the parts of the ear active and NOT let them atrophy or weaken. Through the use of hearing aids – early, when you first notice hearing loss – you should have a better quality of hearing longer.