



## SPECIAL WELCOME REPORT

# Clear as a Bell: How to Restore Failing Hearing

■ **SUPPLEMENTS THAT SUPPORT YOUR HEARING**

■ **HOW TO PREVENT YOUR HEARING FROM GETTING WORSE**

■ **NUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO HEARING LOSS**

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**Note:** Julian Whitaker, M.D. has extensive experience in the areas of preventive medicine and natural healing. All recommendations in this report have met stringent criteria for safety and effectiveness; however, they have not been reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration. The recommendations in this report are not intended to replace the advice of your physician, and you are encouraged to seek advice from competent medical professionals for your personal health needs.



**H**earing impairment always pops up in the top ten health conditions of interest to *Health & Healing* subscribers. According to the National Institutes of Health, one in three Americans over the age of 60 has hearing loss.

It is easy to see why. We live in a sea of noise. The average digital audio player (or MP3 player) can crank out over 100 decibels; lawnmowers and motorcycles can hit 90 decibels; garbage disposals 95; and a passing jet 120. If you go to a rock concert, be prepared to be assaulted with 130 decibels, and the decibel level in the stadium after a touchdown scored by the home team exceeds 135. Any sound above 85 decibels is considered to be harmful to the human ear. The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration prohibits levels above 90 decibels in the workplace. These high noise levels are usually intermittent, but even one very loud pop can blow your hair off—literally.

## No Bald Ears

I'm not talking about the hair that can mysteriously sprout out of men's ears as they get older. I'm talking about hair in the inner ear, past the eardrum and the hammer, anvil, and stirrup (three bones you probably remember from grade school health class). Inside the cochlea are tiny hair cells that trigger nerve fibers to transmit messages to the brain where they are perceived as sound. These hairs are damaged by loud noises, and a lifetime of noise pollution can result in

significant hearing loss. Like teeth, once they are lost, they don't grow back.

It is easy to prevent hearing loss, but restoring it is another matter. The good news is that no matter how poor your current hearing is, you can stop it from getting worse.

## Take Nutritional Supplements

One of the best ways to help preserve your hearing is with proper nutrition. Noise exposure isn't the only cause of hearing impairment in adults. According to a 1999 study, auditory dysfunction is associated with deficiencies in vitamins B12 and folic acid, nutrients that promote healthy nerve function and circulation. Supplementing with B-complex vitamins will help nurture the nerves that conduct hearing impulses and ensure a rich supply of oxygenated blood to the all-important cochlea. Limited but encouraging studies suggest that vitamin A, zinc, and magnesium also benefit the inner ear. Free radicals are felt to be key players in cochlear and hair cell damage, and these antioxidants would afford protection. In addition, *Ginkgo biloba* and vinpocetine, an herbal extract from the lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) plant, have been demonstrated to improve hearing.

## Wear Ear Plugs

I've mowed dozens of lawns and attended scores of football games and a few rock concerts, but I never

## Sweetening the Pain of Ear Infections

Xylitol is a reduced-calorie sweetener that looks and tastes like sugar, but the similarities end there. Unlike sugar, xylitol inhibits the growth of *Streptococcus mutans*, the leading culprit in tooth decay. But that's not its only claim to fame. Researchers have also discovered that xylitol inhibits the growth of bacteria that cause ear infections in young children.

In two studies involving over 1,000 children, xylitol-flavored chewing gum was found to reduce the incidence of middle-ear infections by 40 percent, significantly decreasing the need for antibiotics. The dosage of xylitol used was 8.4 grams per day—the amount contained in about seven sticks of xylitol-sweetened chewing gum.

I recommend xylitol-sweetened chewing gum from Xylitol Works, U.S.A. at 800-601-0688 or [www.xylitolworks.com](http://www.xylitolworks.com) or from Xlear, (pronounced Clear) Inc. at 877-599-5327 or [www.xlear.com](http://www.xlear.com). For best results, a piece of gum should be chewed every few hours.

## A Tip for Swimmers

The best medicine for swimmer's ear is prevention. Use drops containing alcohol and either vinegar or boric acid after swimming. Don't stick your finger in your ear to get water out. This gradually wears down the outer layers of skin and protective wax coating in your ear canal, leading to infection.

thought much about ear protection until I took up skeet and trap shooting. Now I am obsessed with it. I wouldn't dream of going to a shooting range without earplugs, and I encourage my kids to wear them at concerts (even though ear plugs aren't cool). A firecracker going off makes a sound of about 150 decibels. Try to keep your distance, but if you can't, consider wearing earplugs. They reduce noise 15 to 30 decibels if worn properly. If you're in a situation where you are unexpectedly exposed to loud noise, cover your ears with your hands.

### Consider a Hearing Aid

Only a small percentage of people with serious hearing loss do anything about it. Most have a prejudice against hearing aids, and vanity overrules practicality. Yet, there's nothing attractive about missing out on conversations or constantly asking others to repeat themselves. Today's hearing aids are light-years ahead of the ones your grandparents wore 50 years ago. They are small, comfortable, and hardly noticeable. They also work better. While early models amplified all sounds, including nonessential noise, newer hearing aids can be programmed to amplify only sounds within the desired range, such as the high frequencies that are most likely to be affected by hearing loss.

There are so many models and types of hearing aids that I couldn't begin to cover them here. You might have to try several different types, but chances are great that you will find one that works for you. Be aware, however, that Medicare and most insurance companies illogically classify hearing aids as "cosmetic devices," and the cost of several hundred to several thousand dollars just might make your ears ring.

### Recommendations

- If you have hearing difficulties, get a checkup to make sure it isn't caused by an infection in the middle ear or a buildup of wax in the ear canal. In most cases, these problems can be easily treated.
- Don't clean your ears with Q-Tips, as this will likely push wax further back into the canal. Instead, try a drop or two of olive oil in each ear to soften and drain wax buildup.
- When you are around loud noises, use ear protection—disposable foam plugs sold in drugstores, or molded plastic plugs or protective earmuffs, available in sporting goods stores. Cover your ears with your hands if other protection is not available.
- Look into a hearing aid. For more information, contact the American Academy of Audiology at 800-222-2336 or visit [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org).
- Take adequate doses of folic acid (400-800 mcg), vitamin B12 (100 mcg), vitamin A (5,000 IU), zinc (30 mg), and magnesium (500 mg). Also consider *Ginkgo biloba* and vinpocetine. Life Enhancement makes a product called VincaHear that contains these herbs, plus other nutrients for ear health. It is available in health food stores or by calling 800-543-3873. If you are over 65, I recommend taking even higher doses of vitamin B12, up to 1,000 mcg of oral B12 daily or intramuscular injections of 1,000 mcg once or twice a month.

### References

Houston, DK et al. Age-related hearing loss, vitamin B12, and folate in elderly women. *Am J Clin Nutr* 1999;69:564-571.

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