

NEWS

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Hearing Loss is a Significant Factor for Many Veterans

RESTON, Va., Nov. 9, 2017—Given the fact that more than 37.5 million Americans suffer from some type of hearing loss, a growing number of consumers are having hearing tests and using hearing aids and other hearing assistive technologies. While the American Academy of Audiology is helping to educate the public on the importance of good hearing health, the organization also is trying to reach out to veterans. [The Department of Veterans Affairs Annual Benefits Report for FY2016](#) indicates there were 1,084,069 veterans receiving disability compensation for hearing loss and 1,610,911 were being compensated for tinnitus (the perception of sound in the ears or head when no external noise is present, frequently is associated with hearing loss).

“When they were service members, many veterans were exposed to loud noises from sources such as aircraft, gunfire, or blasts”. Hearing loss and tinnitus can be caused by loud sound exposure,” said Jackie Clark, Ph.D., president of the American Academy of Audiology and clinical professor at the UT Dallas School of Brain & Behavior Sciences. “Veterans who were exposed to blasts or who sustained a traumatic brain injury may also have difficulty with processing speech in background noise or in group situations, in addition to difficulty with balance function.”

Auditory processing disorder is a condition where some veterans score normally on hearing tests but have difficulty understanding speech especially when background noise is present. The condition often can be associated with blast exposure. Veterans with traumatic brain injury also may experience hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance problems.

The severity of hearing loss sometimes can be reduced, improved, or reversed through surgery or medication. In many cases hearing loss is permanent; however, hearing aids and other hearing assistive technologies can help to improve hearing and communication abilities.

Though in the general population most people with hearing loss could be helped by hearing aids, only about one in five who would benefit from them actually use them.

Tinnitus, another condition that many veterans suffer with, is the number one disability among veterans. People with tinnitus may experience ringing sounds, a buzzing noise, a high-pitched whistle, or numerous other sounds. “Causes and effects vary and there isn’t a cure yet for tinnitus but there are tinnitus management techniques for learning how to manage reactions to tinnitus,” said Dr. Lynn Henselman, Department of Defense Hearing Center of Excellence, a collaboration between DoD and VA that focuses on the prevention, mitigation, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of hearing and balance problems in military Service members and their families and veterans. One such approach is Progressive Tinnitus Management, a program developed in VA and used in the VA and DoD,” added Henselman.

“While many veterans suffer with hearing impairment from exposure to loud noises associated with their time in the military, it is important that all veterans have their hearing checked,” Henselman said.

Henselman continued, “For these veterans, they may not only have noise-induced hearing loss from their military service but now age-related hearing loss may impact their ability to hear. Often, those who have lived with a hearing loss for a long time don’t realize the severity and how much benefit they’d receive from hearing aids and other hearing rehabilitation strategies.”

The American Academy of Audiology recommends that everyone see an audiologist to have their hearing checked. The Academy provides a list of licensed audiologists on its website: www.audiology.org. Click on “Find an Audiologist.”

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to www.howsyourhearing.org.

Veterans Affairs offers comprehensive care services to eligible veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance concerns. The VA’s Veterans Health Administration is America’s largest integrated health care system, providing care at [1,243 health care facilities](#), including 170 medical centers and 1,063 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity (VHA outpatient clinics), serving 9 million enrolled Veterans each year. www.va.gov/health/