



## What's That You Say? Managing Hearing Health as We Age

Hearing loss is a common part of aging, but it affects much more than just your ears. When it becomes hard to hear, it also becomes hard to socialize, understand important information, and stay active in everyday life.

Experts at a recent meeting of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP) shared that while hearing loss affects more than half of people over age 71 (and 96% of those over 90), there are many ways to manage it and stay connected.



### Understanding the Different Types of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss isn't just about volume; it often involves difficulty filtering out background noise or processing rapid speech. Doctors generally group hearing loss into three categories:

- **Conductive:** This happens when sound cannot move easily through the outer ear to the eardrum. It makes sounds seem softer and can often be corrected medically or with hearing aids.
- **Sensorineural:** This is permanent damage to the inner ear (the cochlea) or the nerve pathways. It usually cannot be fixed with surgery, but technology can help.
- **Mixed:** A combination of both conductive and sensorineural issues.
- **Tinnitus:** This is a persistent ringing, buzzing, or humming in the ear. It can be caused by noise exposure or even certain medications. While there is no "cure," it can be managed with white noise machines or counseling.

### Support and Solutions

Today, there are more ways than ever to improve your hearing. Depending on your needs, options include:

- **Traditional Hearing Aids:** These come in many styles, including "Behind the Ear" (BTE) or "Completely in the Canal" (CIC).
- **Implants:** For severe loss, cochlear implants or bone-anchored hearing aids can stimulate the hearing nerves directly.
- **Over-the-Counter (OTC) Options:** You can now buy personal sound amplifiers without a prescription. A major innovation in 2024 was the Apple AirPods Pro 2, which received FDA approval for software that helps with mild to moderate hearing loss.



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### The Role of Your Medications

Many people are surprised to learn that certain medications are ototoxic, meaning they can contribute to hearing loss or tinnitus. Your pharmacist is a key partner in identifying these risks. Common medications that may affect hearing include:

- **Common Pain Relievers:** Frequent use (two or more days per week) of aspirin, NSAIDs, or acetaminophen
- **Certain Antibiotics:** Specifically, medications in the aminoglycoside family
- **Water Pills:** Loop diuretics used for heart issues or blood pressure
- **Other Medications:** Certain chemotherapy drugs, opioids, and even some erectile dysfunction medications

**Note:** Always talk to your pharmacist or doctor before changing your medication routine.

### Tips for Better Communication

To make conversations easier and reduce frustration, try these strategies:

- **Position Yourself:** Speak face-to-face to allow for lip reading.
- **Find Quiet:** Move away from background noise like TVs or crowded dining rooms.
- **Adjust the Pitch:** It is often easier to hear a lower pitch than a loud, high-pitched shout.
- **Slow Down:** Give your brain time to process words by asking others to speak clearly and at a moderate pace.

### Protecting Your Ears

Simple habits can protect the hearing you have left. Stay away from cotton swabs, which can damage the ear canal. If you are a swimmer, keep your ears dry with ear plugs. And always turn down the volume when using headphones or earbuds.

### Questions for Your Pharmacist

Since pharmacists are experts in how medications affect the body, they can help you spot “ototoxic” risks.

- Could any of my current prescription or over the counter medications be affecting my hearing?
- If one or more of my medications is known to affect hearing, is there an alternative medication or dosage change that I could talk to my doctor about?
- I take aspirin or NSAIDs — is the frequency that I use them high enough to increase my risk for hearing loss?



# RESIDENT EDUCATION SERIES

## What's That You Say? Managing Hearing Health as We Age

### Want to Know More?

- 10 Signs of Hearing Loss You Shouldn't Ignore: <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/hearing-loss-signs/>
- Hearing Loss: A Common Problem for Older Adults: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/hearing-and-hearing-loss/hearing-loss-common-problem-older-adults>
- Hearing Loss: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17673-hearing-loss>
- Speak Up About Hearing Loss: [https://www.caringfortheages.com/article/S1526-4114\(13\)00030-9/fulltext](https://www.caringfortheages.com/article/S1526-4114(13)00030-9/fulltext)