

properly at the earliest stages of hearing loss. This loss of neurons is experienced throughout the brain and may lead to cerebral atrophy (brain shrinkage). As these neurons die, the brain's ability to hear is profoundly impacted (remember – we hear with our brains, not our ears!). Unfortunately, once the damage in the ears begins, the nerves will continue to be impacted and the damage becomes progressively worse with age. Therefore, most forms of hearing loss are medically defined as a progressive degenerative disorder.

Listening to others and following the conversation is otherwise simple and effortless with normal hearing, but with hearing loss the brain will strain just to hold a conversation. The brain has four unique hearing capabilities, including:

1. Localization – the ability to determine where sounds are coming from.
2. Recognition – the ability to recognize words and understand the conversation.
3. Focus – tuning in to what is important (e.g., somebody speaking to you) especially in noisy rooms.
4. Separation – segregating out what you want to hear from what you don't want to hear.

Each of these tasks relies on a vast and robust neural network of information coming from the ears. Thus, each of these is negatively affected when hearing loss and tinnitus wreak havoc on the neural networks from ear-to-

brain, even at the earliest stages of the disorder.

Take Action!

With hearing loss and tinnitus, the damage to your ears and brain is not reversible; however, with treatment you can slow down the progression of the impact that hearing loss has on life. The medical treatment of hearing loss and tinnitus is custom prescribed to address the needs of each patient by restoring clarity, supporting the four cognitive tasks mentioned above and, most importantly, allowing people to maintain high-quality communication with others

even in the noisiest situations.

If you or a loved one are feeling that 'something has changed' and that it is more difficult to hear and follow a conversation in noisy situations than it 'used to be', don't wait. The prognosis for treatment is significantly improved when treatment starts early (said differently – the longer you wait for treatment, the worse the prognosis!). Consult with a hearing healthcare specialist who understands that the impact of hearing loss goes far beyond the ears and impacts the brain and your life.



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