Hearing loss affects 10 per cent of Canadians and up to 50 per cent of seniors over 65 years. With the overall aging of our population and the high noise levels of modern society, the prevalence of hearing loss will continue to increase.

Hearing loss has a habit of "sneaking up" on us. In many cases, it occurs so gradually that a hearing impaired individual is not even aware of his/her difficulty until a family member complains. Other signs to alert you to a possible hearing loss include difficulty hearing in a noisy room or a group, frequently asking people to repeat, inability to hear the phone ring or birds sing, a ringing or buzzing in your ears, speaking loudly, or being accused of 'tuning out".

In addition, if you have any history of noise exposure, chronic ear infections, or family history of hearing impairment, you are at increased risk for significant hearing loss.

Because hearing impairment varies widely in the type and degree of loss, each individual may experience difficulty in different situations. Some people find that voices aren't loud enough, while others say the volume is fine, but they just can understand the words.

If you suspect hearing loss in yourself or someone you know, your doctor can refer you to an audiologist who will perform a complete hearing assessment

Audiologists are professionals with a master's degree in hearing science. They are trained in the diagnosis and management of hearing loss.

## Counselling service

Audiologists perform a variety of services, including hearing tests on all ages, prescribing hearing aids, counselling patients regarding their hearing loss and use of a hearing aid and teaching people ways to improve their communication abilities".

The Audiology Department at the Milton District Hospital is equipped with state-of-the-art instruments for the diagnosis of hearing loss as well as evaluation of hearing aid function.

## with SUE THOMSEN

Having worked at several large hospitals I can say Milton Hospital's equipment is, by far, the best that I've ever worked with. In addition, the department is well structured, to permit time for thorough testing, as well as lots of counselling. Counselling patients is my most important role. Hearing loss can be a very emotional issue and each person's hearing loss must by managed according to their individual feelings and needs.

## Different tests

Hearing assessment involves several different tests. Patients are first questioned regarding their history and current signs of hearing loss. A test is then conducted to determine the softest tones audible to that individual as well as their ability to discriminate speech. In addition, impedance testing is done to assess middle ear function, and thus enable the identification of middle ear infection or other medically-related problems.

Based on these test results, the audiologist is able to diagnose the type and degree of hearing loss and then make recommendations for either medical treatment or a hearing aid.

Individuals who obtain hearing aids are seen for follow-up visits to assess the functioning of their hearing aids and ensure that the patient is satisfied. Most people don't realize that they obtain their hearing aid on a trail basis and are not obligated to keep it if they're not satisfied. Today's health care system is well-designed to protect the consumer with regard to hearing aids.

Hearing loss remains one of the most underdiagnosed and undertreated disabilities, mostly due to people's reluctance to confront their hearing problems. So those of you who find that "everyone mumbles", take advantage of the high-tech audiology facilities available here in your own community.

This is one of a series of articles prepared by Sue Thomsen, audiologist at Milton District Hospital.

# Fashion show on tonight

A fashion show at Jukebox, Charlies tonight (Friday) will benefit a planned home for severely disabled adults.

Proceeds from the \$4 admission price will go to Deborah's Home. Local 2 models will show off the creations of Toronto-based designers. Holiday wear, leathers and casuals will be among the styles in the fund-raising show. The fashion show begins at 9 p.m. Jukebox Charlies is located at the 3 corner of Main and Bruce streets, just west of Ontario Street.

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