

Hearing Associates
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Providing excellent customer service & quality hearing aids to our patients since 1987. Hearing Associates, P.C. is your hearing healthcare expert in Mason City, Northern Iowa, and Albert Lea, Minnesota.

Hear in the Now News

Fall 2022



Hear in the Now Announcements

There's a New Audiologist at Hearing Associates



We want to extend a warm welcome to Audiologist Bryce Phillips. Bryce was born and raised in California and grew up in a home where he and his parents cared for physically and intellectually disabled individuals, some of whom had hearing loss.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in social work from Brigham Young University-Idaho, a Bachelor in Science in communicative disorders from Utah State University, and a Doctorate in Audiology from the University of North Texas.

Bryce plans to continue to learn about the science of audiology and hearing technology through ongoing training and conferences. He will be based out of our Mason City, Iowa office.

He's married and the father of four crazy kids who keep him and his wife on their toes.

October Community Service Events



The Hearing Associates team participated in several outreach and service projects over the last few months. During October, we donated \$20 to Habitat for Humanity for every patient who received a hearing screening. A portion of all private hearing aid sales was also donated. We donated \$4,600 to Habitat for Humanity. Thank you to our generous community for your support.



Our team hosted a pumpkin carving contest and posted the results to our Facebook page. We encouraged users to vote for their favorites, with each like accounting for \$1 donated to One Vision Children's Autism Center.

Katelin's "Gnome Home" pumpkin won the vote. She received a gift card and our traveling trophy made by our talented insurance specialist, Heather. With our followers' help, we raised \$325 for the One Vision Children's Autism Center's Halloween Event. Thank you to all who participated!



→ Our offices will be closed January 24 & 25 for staff training.

Hearing Associates Earns Three Local Awards

We're proud and grateful to announce that Hearing Associates has been honored with several awards from the Albert Lea Tribune and the Globe Gazette.

Globe Gazette Northern Iowa Employers of Choice 2022

We were nominated for this award by our incredible staff and selected by a committee of community leaders. There were more than 100 nominees included in this year's selection, and we were lucky enough to be chosen. Hearing Associates strives to create an environment where our employees have the perks, benefits and flexibility they need to succeed on the job. Company culture is important to us, and our open-door policy is crucial to maintaining our welcoming environment.



Globe Gazette Readers' Choice 2022

The Hearing Associates team also earned the Readers' Choice Award for Hearing Audiologist & Hearing Aid Provider.

"Hearing solutions are more than devices or technology; we work on communication strategies with the patient as well as with the significant others in their lives who are impacted by their hearing loss to alleviate communication breakdowns and improve quality of life," said owner and audiologist Stuart Trembath.

Albert Lea Tribune Readers' Choice 2022

Finally, our Albert Lea, Minnesota, office was honored with the Readers' Choice Award for Hearing Aide Center. We want to thank all the readers who voted for our office and look forward to continuing to provide excellence in hearing solutions.

We wouldn't be the hearing healthcare providers we've become without the support and dedication of our incredible staff.

How Ear Infections Affect Your Hearing

It's common to experience temporary hearing loss with an ear infection. But you should seek medical attention to avoid permanent hearing damage if you have recurring infections.

The Eustachian Tube

The Eustachian tube connects your nose, throat and ears and is the most common cause of ear infections. It's not unusual to get an ear infection after developing a cold, allergies or the flu. Germs transfer from the Eustachian tube and settle in the middle ear, causing inflammation.

Types of Ear Infections

Acute otitis media: The most common type of ear infection occurs when the Eustachian tube becomes infected with a bacteria or virus, causing inflammation and pain in the middle ear.

Otitis media with effusion: Mucus and fluid buildup linger in the Eustachian tube and middle ear after an infection has healed.

Chronic suppurative otitis media: Complications from repeat ear infections damage the eardrum, resulting in discharge from the middle ear.

Adhesive otitis media: This type of ear infection occurs when the Eustachian tube stops functioning properly for an extended period, causing the eardrum to collapse and adhere to the inner ear structures.

Otitis externa: Also known as Swimmer's ear, this infection is caused by bacteria-infested water getting trapped in the outer ear canal.

Symptoms of Ear Infections

- Fever
- Ear pain, swelling and pressure
- Pus-filled or bloody drainage
- Balance issues
- Hearing loss
- Diarrhea and vomiting

When to See a Doctor

Ear infections can cause temporary hearing loss because the swelling in the middle ear prevents sound vibrations from traveling to the inner ear. Your body can heal ear infections on its own, but there are some instances when you should seek medical attention.

These are signs of serious infection:

- Fever higher than 102° F
- A lump near the outer ear
- Fluid drainage
- Symptoms lasting longer than three days
- Facial swelling

Treating Ear Infections

Over-the-counter medication can treat ear pain and swelling. Hot and cold compresses can ease inflammation and discomfort. Gargling salt water will clear your Eustachian tube of lingering germs.

Because ear infections usually resolve themselves, doctors reserve antibiotics for severe cases to avoid developing antibiotic-resistant bacteria and viruses. However, your doctor may prescribe medication and eardrops to address your symptoms.

Depending on the type of ear infection, your doctor could conduct a myringotomy, creating a small hole in your eardrum to drain trapped fluid.

Is There a Connection Between Hearing Loss and Cognitive Decline?

Untreated hearing loss may increase your risk of developing cognitive decline, dementia and Alzheimer's. A study from the University of Oxford showed people who had difficulty hearing spoken conversations amid background noise had a 91% increased risk of dementia.

How Hearing Loss Affects Brain Health

The hair cells in your inner ear send signals to the auditory cortex of your brain for interpretation. Your brain is like a muscle; it needs exercise to stay in shape and function properly. Without sound stimulation, the nerve connections in your auditory cortex will begin to atrophy, decreasing your overall brain function.



Confusing Hearing Loss with Cognitive Decline

Hearing loss presents symptoms that may be confused with cognitive decline, including:

- Trouble understanding speech
- Difficulty following conversations
- Mental fatigue after conversations
- Withdrawing from social settings

Can Hearing Aids Prevent Dementia?

While hearing aids may not prevent cognitive decline, studies suggest they could slow its progression. That's because hearing devices provide your auditory cortex with the sound stimulation it needs to stay active. Wearing hearing aids also decreases cognitive load by clarifying sounds before they get to your brain. Consistent hearing aid use helps your brain relearn the sounds it's been missing. That can rebuild synapses in your brain and lower your risk of cognitive decline.

How to Protect Your Brain

Train your brain: Learning new skills and indulging your creativity keep your brain active. Puzzles, crosswords, brain teasers and word searches encourage focus. Active listening is a good way to help your brain relearn sounds, especially if you're a new hearing aid user. Sit in a quiet spot in your house and pinpoint the sources of background sounds like the clock ticking.

Socialize: Engaging with other people is essential to maintaining your brain health. Socializing requires you to listen, observe and process different kinds of stimuli. It also lowers your risk of isolation, which can lead to depression and cognitive decline.

Feed your brain: Eating a balanced diet gives your mind the nutrients it needs to stay healthy. Berries provide powerful antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties that are good for your ears and brain. Fish contains omega-3 fatty acids that support cognition and communication between neurons. Leafy greens like spinach, cabbage and broccoli have folic acid, which is good for circulation and reduces oxidative stress on brain cells.

Tips for Flying with Hearing Aids

Airports and planes may seem overwhelming if you wear hearing aids, but there are steps you can take to get through security and enjoy your flight without stress.

What to Do Before You Go

Visit your audiologist before your trip to have your hearing aids adjusted and cleaned.

Consider packing the following essentials:

- **Extra hearing aid batteries:** Pack hearing aid batteries in your carry-on or personal bag so you'll never be without power.
- **A cleaning kit:** Your hearing aids may be exposed to increased wear and tear during your vacation.
- **Extra wax guards and hearing aid domes:** Those replacement items will help keep your devices protected and functioning.
- **Bluetooth accessories:** You may require a Bluetooth microphone to hear your travel companions or a nearby flight attendant.
- **Drying kit or dehumidifier:** Those items are especially helpful when traveling in a humid climate.

Getting Through Security

You don't have to remove your hearing aids to go through airport security. Modern hearing aids aren't affected by metal detectors and X-ray machines. Ask security personnel if you're unsure about taking your hearing aids through the metal detector. Never put your hearing aids on the security conveyor belt because you could lose or damage your devices.

While You're on the Plane

Switch your devices to airplane mode if you have Bluetooth hearing aids. You may need to adjust the volume on your hearing aids once the plane engines turn on, but don't remove them. Taking out your devices increases your chance of dropping or misplacing them. Talk with the flight attendants to get clear safety instructions.

Using Hearing Loops

More airports are providing hearing loops, which use a wire to produce electromagnetic signals for telecoil hearing aids. Hearing loops allow you to hear better in places with lots of background noise but are only compatible with certain hearing aids. If you have telecoil hearing devices, you'll need to turn on the t-coil setting to connect to a hearing loop.

