

Integrating Well-Hearing is Well-Being into clinical conversations

Hearing loss is highly prevalent¹, but its impact is often underestimated and ultimately it remains highly undertreated^{2,3,4}. It is time to change the conversation from "needing a hearing aid because you do not hear well", to a conversation about what hearing well, and hearing rehabilitation can truly mean for an individual.

The scientific discussion that one's overall well-being, across multiple domains including social-emotional, cognitive and physical, is critically linked to hearing well is not new, and the evidence is growing to support it⁵. However, integrating this evidence into everyday clinical consultations that are easy to understand and are impactful can be difficult.

We know that our sense of well-being is very personal and multidimensional. For one person it can be happiness, independence, or staying active. For another person it can be social participation, fulfilling relationships with family and friends, or achievements in the workplace. Well-being seems to inherently relate to things that we value most and this, we know, can change throughout life.

Hearing loss will impact different people in many different ways, and understanding which domain your client is most struggling with or which is most important can help tailor your messaging to best suit their needs no matter where he or she is in the hearing journey.

Hearing care providers play a key role here and are uniquely positioned to change the conversation by putting hearing loss in a broader context of healthy living and talking about how hearing loss and communication challenges due to hearing loss can influence all 3 dimensions of well-being.

When speaking to your client, listen for "triggers" to understand which domain(s) is having the most impact on his or her well-being. Use this information to adapt your counseling and treatment plan accordingly. In the following chart you will see a brief and not all-inclusive list of key complaints. These can help inform you on how your client's hearing loss may be impacting his or her overall well-being and what benefits of hearing well may be most important during goal setting and hearing aid consultation.





Social-emotional	Cognitive	Physical
Disconnected Distant Emotional Frustrated Lonely Sad/depressed Stays home	Avoidant Confused Exhausted Forgets Giving-up activities Headaches Irritated Tired Works hard Worn-out	Appearance/cosmetics Caught off-guard Nervous Scared Surprised Unaware Vulnerable


Conversation starters

Actively listen to the concerns or complaints a client may voice. Address these and involve the spouse, friend or family member who has accompanied them into the appointment for additional insight. Validate and affirm the responses you receive with messaging about the benefits of hearing well that extend beyond just the ability to hear.

"When we hear well, we are well equipped to embrace the life we want. Growing evidence shows that treating hearing loss can positively impact your well-being in a multitude of different ways⁵."

 Hearing well fosters easier engagement, stronger connections and a more positive outlook. Hearing aid users and their communication partners report social benefits from using hearing technology^{6,7}.

 Hearing well supports cognitive fitness⁸. More frequent use of hearing aids is associated with greater improvements in cognitive function⁹.

 Hearing well enables people to live a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Ask questions to help clients understand the overall impact of better hearing and consistent hearing aid use.

Social-emotional	Cognitive	Physical
<p>"Hearing well allows us to be socially active, connect with others, and communicate effectively – without barriers."</p> <p>"Using hearing aids can improve your quality of life, social interactions, and relationship satisfaction for you and your loved ones."</p>	<p>"The brain plays a crucial role in listening and speech understanding – it's important to keep it stimulated."</p> <p>"Hearing aid use is linked to improved memory⁸ and other cognitive functions."</p> <p>"Hearing aid use lowers the amount of effort you have to put into listening, leaving you mental energy for other things as well."</p>	<p>"Having the right hearing solution means that you are well-equipped to deal with different listening situations and for an active lifestyle."</p> <p>"Hearing well provides you with greater environmental awareness, fostering feelings of security and confidence."</p> <p>"Hearing aids have been shown to make listening easier⁷, which makes you feel less tired."</p>

<p>Ask:</p> <p><i>"Tell me what it would mean if you didn't have to struggle to hear – do you think that would impact your choice to go out more with your friends & family?"</i></p>	<p>Ask:</p> <p><i>"What would it mean to you if you could hear better and participate in interactions with others without feeling exhausted at the end of the day?"</i></p>	<p>Ask:</p> <p><i>"Tell me how hearing better would change the way you interact in your environment around you? Would you go out more often? Be more active?"</i></p>
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Examples of the Well-Hearing is Well-Being conversation

Social-emotional	Cognitive	Physical
<p>Janet reports she has difficulty hearing in noise and struggles to hear her grandchildren. She has given up on going out to eat and often stays home watching TV and misses being able to be social.</p>	<p>Clyde says his hearing is okay but he has to work hard at it. His wife says he is tired all the time and often forgets things he has just been told.</p>	<p>Myra is a widow who lives alone. Last year her house caught fire and she was unaware because she could not hear the fire alarm downstairs. She is worried that her hearing loss will impact her ability to live independently.</p>
<p>Janet's HCP listens to Janet's complaints and recognizes her struggle to connect with others.</p> <p>They discuss the impact hearing loss has on our social and emotional well-being, and how this can cause social withdrawal and isolation.</p> <p>Fortunately, hearing aids are designed to address these issues and help improve hearing, especially in social environments.</p>	<p>Clyde's HCP actively involves Clyde's wife in the appointment. Together they discuss the toll that hearing loss is taking on Clyde's mental well-being.</p> <p>They talk about the interplay of cognition and hearing, and how the demands of listening with a hearing loss can overload our memory and lead to difficulties in everyday life.</p> <p>They laugh together as they notice that even now Clyde is hyper-focused on the conversation so as not to miss any of what is said.</p>	<p>Myra's HCP understands that hearing loss can impact one's sense of safety and security, especially when living alone.</p> <p>They discuss the ways in which hearing aids directly address these concerns by enhancing situational awareness and improving her ability to use the telephone should she need help.</p>
<p>Janet's HCP suggests a trial of hearing technology, which will include her wearing the hearing aids in a noisy restaurant.</p> <p>They also discuss Janet joining a local organization for people with hearing loss, to help her socialize in a comfortable setting.</p>	<p>Clyde's HCP suggests a trial of amplification in which both he and his wife will actively participate to monitor Clyde's progress.</p> <p>They also discuss Clyde returning to some of his old hobbies like playing cards or chess to see if he starts to enjoy these again.</p>	<p>Myra's HCP recommends a trial of hearing technology, with a remote follow-up to ensure her success with hearing aids in her home environment.</p> <p>Myra's HCP also recommends assistive accessories to address some of her physical safety concerns in the home.</p>

Conclusions

As we have seen, hearing loss and its effects can take a toll on many domains of our lives.. Hearing aids are one the best treatment options for hearing loss, but not the only one. Consider what other treatment recommendations you can make to promote enhanced well-being. For instance, suggesting a social environment like a hearing loss support group for someone struggling with self-isolation. Encourage them to engage in conversations, participate in activities. Building relationships is key for successful hearing rehabilitation and overall well-being. Just as we encourage you to think beyond the hearing loss, remember to think beyond the hearing aids.

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