

May is National Speech and Hearing Month ? know the risks

By Brian Lockhart

Hearing health has a broader impact on overall physical and mental health than most people realize.

May is Speech and Hearing Month in Canada, which helps educate the public on hearing health and the risks associated with hearing loss.

Statistics Canada says 50 per cent of the population over 50 has measurable hearing loss or tinnitus. Hearing loss can affect people of all ages and has a number of causes.

'Age-related hearing loss seems to be the cause most recognized by people,' explained Elliot Tiede, hearing instrument specialist with Hear Well Be Well. 'That might explain why so many people think hearing aids are only for old people. There are many other causes which is why hearing loss doesn't affect only our senior population. Hearing loss can be caused by illness, loud noise damage, genetics or even medications. There are more than 200 over-the-counter and prescription ototoxic medications that contribute to hearing loss.'

Hearing loss has been known to affect relationships. A person with hearing loss may experience isolation. Finding it difficult to communicate in social settings can make the person with hearing loss refuse to go out. Their partner is also impacted with feelings of frustration, not only from constantly being asked to repeat themselves but also from missing social activities because their partner does not want to attend.

Untreated hearing loss is strongly linked to an increased risk of developing dementia. It now stands as the number one modifiable risk for dementia. Untreated hearing loss increases the risks by up to five times, and even mild hearing loss can double the risk of developing dementia.

Research reveals that people with even mild hearing loss are at a three-fold greater risk of having a history of falling. It has also been suggested that people who cannot hear well might be less aware of their environment, making trips and falls more likely.