

## First-time Users: Just the Facts

### The Situation

At least three in four people will do nothing about their hearing loss. Among those who do, it takes 7 to 10 years from the time they could benefit from amplification for them to take action. (Market Trak VIII)

Market penetration for hearing devices is increasing slowly with 1 in 4 people with hearing loss now accepting hearing solutions and among them, 8 in 10 are fitted with binaural devices. However, fewer than 1 in 10 people with mild hearing loss use amplification, and only 4 in 10 people with moderate-to-severe hearing loss use hearing amplification. (Market Trak VII)

First-time users are one of the biggest hurdles faced by hearing care professionals today.

Hearing care professionals spend approximately 40 percent of their week on first-time users without getting the desired results or understanding why they are not successful. (*Hearing Journal* Survey of Dispensing Practices – U.S. September 2009)

### First-time Users: Oticon Insight-Based Observations

Oticon conducted a web-based survey of approximately 1,500 adults (750 first-time users) in US, Canada, Germany, France and Italy who were experiencing hearing difficulty but have never worn hearing aids. Participants were men (54%) and women (46%), ages 55-plus with the majority ages 55 to 65. Of the group, 50% were retired, 30% working full-time. They described their social activity as: very active (32%), moderately active (45%) and less active (23%).

Not surprisingly, the study confirmed existing knowledge that understanding speech in noise is the most common problem. Participants became aware of their hearing loss because they needed to concentrate and therefore had to use extra energy to compensate for their hearing difficulties.

- 60% find it difficult to follow conversations
- 41% must concentrate to hear someone talk/whisper
- 30% have difficulties understanding the television
- 29% have difficulties understanding what people say

The need to concentrate and use extra energy to hear people talk and embarrassment around asking people to repeat are the biggest effects of their hearing difficulties.

While less than 20% of all participants experiencing hearing difficulties contacted a hearing care professional, 40% haven't done anything and 41% are in the process:

- 19% Talked to relatives and friends
- 17% Searched on the Internet
- 5% Acquired information

Approximately 70% of the respondents are concerned that what they are experiencing is a problem. Their areas of concern indicate that they have little awareness and knowledge about hearing in general, and the symptoms and related implications of a hearing loss:

- Is it a hearing loss? (30%)
- Is it permanent? (23%)
- Will it get worse? (37%)
- Can something be done? (28%)
- When should I seek help? (23%)
- Where can I get more information? (15%)
- Can I afford hearing instruments? (25%)

When asked if they were interested in a solution to their hearing difficulties, 65% indicated they were very interested (18%) to somewhat interested (47%).

Oticon researchers observed that people who perceived themselves as “active” were quicker to take action to address their hearing loss. The ability to participate actively, effortlessly and naturally – where hearing loss is not an issue – was considered extremely important.

The study report also noted that the style, design and discreetness of hearing instruments are also key determining factors in non-user adoption of hearing instruments.

When asked, study participants gave a number of reasons for not visiting a hearing care professional including:

- My hearing difficulties do not bother me that much (48%)
- Hearing instruments are too expensive (38%)
- I don't like the idea of wearing hearing instruments (26%)
- There are other things in my life that have higher priority (24%)
- I don't want people to think I am old or handicapped (13%)

## **Benefits of Hearing Solutions**

The negative impact of untreated hearing loss is real. A National Council on Aging (US) study of 2,300 hearing impaired adults age 50 and older found that those with untreated hearing loss were more likely to report depression, anxiety, and paranoia and were less likely to participate in organized social activities, compared to those who wear hearing aids.

In the same study, hearing aid users reported significant improvements in many areas of their lives, ranging from their relationships at home and sense of independence to their social life and their sex life. In virtually every dimension measured, the families of hearing aid users also noted the improvements and were even more likely than the users to report improvements.