



Heard It
Through
The Grapevine
Audiology, PC

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Say what?

Baby boomers not losing hearing as much as parents did

By John Fauber of the Journal Sentinel, Jan. 14, 2010

Although they were the first generation to endure rock concerts, boom boxes and iPods, the baby boomers have lost less of their hearing than their parents, according to a study by researchers at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

The findings, which are to be published Friday in a medical journal, suggest that hearing can be preserved even as people age.

"We didn't know that," said Wen Chen, a program director with the National Institute on Aging, which financed the study.

The study used data from the Beaver Dam Offspring Study, which involved 5,275 people from that community and their offspring born between 1902 and 1962.

While everyday life may be getting noisier, actual hearing loss from one generation to the next has declined, said Weihai Zhan, lead author of the study, which was published Friday in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

Overall, the baby boomers had 31% less hearing loss than their parents.

Among men who were born between 1944 and 1949, 36% had a hearing impairment. However, among men born between 1930 and 1935, 58% had a hearing loss at the same age.

Among women born between 1945 and 1949, 12% had hearing impairment, compared with 23% among women born between 1930 and 1939.

Prior to the study, it would have been expected that 66 million Americans would be hearing-impaired by 2030. However, the new findings suggest that number is more likely to be 51 million.



The authors cautioned that because the study was based in the mostly white Beaver Dam area, its results do not necessarily apply to other regions or racial groups.

Still, the findings run contrary to the belief that large numbers of baby boomers are destined to lose their hearing because of exposure to loud music.

Indeed, hearing loss from one-time events such as concerts may be temporary, while daily exposure to excessive noise is a bigger concern, co-author Karen Cruickshanks said in a statement.

More stringent rules about workplace noise and fewer people working in noisy industries such as mining and manufacturing also may be contributing to less hearing loss in the younger generation.

Reduced smoking may also play an indirect role, said UW researcher Zhan. Smoking increases the risk of heart disease, which can lead to less blood flow to the inner ear, he said.

Another factor may be better health care and antibiotics resulting in less inflammation and infection, said Cruickshanks, a professor of population health sciences and ophthalmology and visual sciences.

If hearing loss was genetically determined, you would not see this loss over a generation, she said.

The authors concluded that there was strong evidence that environmental, lifestyle or other modifiable factors might contribute to hearing impairment in older adults.

"These data suggest that hearing impairment with aging is a preventable or delayable disorder rather than a normal part of the aging process," they wrote.

FUN FACTS

In World War One (WWI) parrots were kept on the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France because of their remarkable sense of hearing. When the parrots heard the enemy aircraft coming, they would warn everyone of the approaching danger long before any human ear could hear it.

Better Hearing Institute,
www.betterhearing.org



HEARING LOSS SUPPORT GROUPS

Hearing Loss Association of America

Local chapters within DFW metroplex
www.hearingloss.org/chapters

SayWhatClub (SWC)

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www.saywhatclub.com

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Meet Our Staff



Tara Wheeler, Au.D. – Dr. Wheeler received her Doctorate of Audiology from the University of Texas at Dallas. She resides in Grapevine with her husband and daughter. Dr. Wheeler enjoys knitting and traveling in her spare time.



Margie Swoyer, Business Manager – Margie received her B.S. degree in Industrial Administration from Iowa State University in Ames. She lives in Southlake with her husband and two teenage sons. Margie enjoys reading and sewing.