

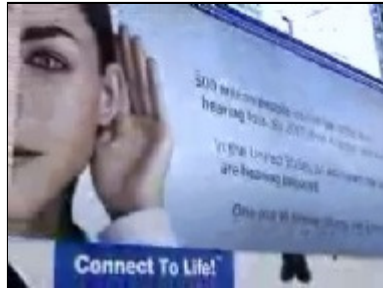
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New campaign aims to raise awareness of risks of hearing loss

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By: Kafi Drexel

"The biggest misconception is that hearing loss is only a disorder that affects us as we get older," says Dr. Craig Kasper of the New York Otolaryngology Group. "Yes, that's true, there's a higher likelihood, but the reality is that about 65 percent of people in this country – which is about 31.5 million people in the U.S. that have hearing loss currently – 65 percent are under 65, so no one is immune, everyone is at risk regardless of your age or who you are."



Elizabeth Auda is one of those people. She started experiencing hearing loss at the age of 44.

"In 2004 I went on a trip to Florida and really believed there had been air turbulence or something, or my ear was clogged or I had a virus in the ear. Long story short, it didn't go away," says Auda.

To combat hearing loss, the "Hear the World Day" campaign is being launched in New York and other major cities throughout the month of May. As part of the campaign, sponsored by Phonak group, a maker of hearing technology, free screenings are being offered.

Screening is simple. You raise your hand if you hear any sound, while the audiologist tests you to see if it's within normal range. If there are any problems then you're recommended for further diagnostic testing.

Doctors say a simple way to know if noise is too loud is if you can't speak to someone within comfortable distance without screaming. And they say there are easy ways we can protect our ears, such as: use earplugs when in loud environments for extended periods of time; get sound-isolating headphones for your mp3 player; put your fingers over your ears in the subway station.

Get screenings on a regular basis – at least once a year if routinely exposed to noise.

"Get a baseline, so we understand where you are today, where we have a baseline for comparison for future tests to see if there has been a change," says Dr. Kasper. "If there is some sort hearing loss noted during that test, they should pursue help as soon as possible because untreated hearing loss has been linked to much more than just trouble with verbal and sound-based communication."

For more information on the Hear the World campaign, go to www.hear-the-world.com/.

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