

Successful ageing



Senior citizens aged 60 and above can get their ears checked at the Project Silver Screen functional screening programme. PHOTOS: MINISTRY OF HEALTH, TED CHEN

Sound advice on hearing loss

Medical expert Dr Barrie Tan Yau Boon shares why it is vital for seniors to have good hearing throughout their golden years

Jac Woo

As people grow older, they may start developing age-related hearing loss.

Initially, the hearing loss is very mild and not perceptible.

It affects both ears and progresses gradually with age till it finally becomes noticeable to both the person as well as his family and friends.

What are the signs that a senior's hearing ability is declining?

■ **Turning up the volume of entertainment devices:** When a senior increases the volume of his television or radio to a very high level, this is an early sign that he is trying to overcome his poorer hearing ability.

■ **Not getting the message:** The senior may not seem to hear what has been said. Some seniors may ask the speaker to repeat what was just said or to speak louder. Others may lean closer to the speaker to hear better.

■ **Difficulty in hearing voices of women and children:** As age-related hearing loss affects the high frequencies more than the low frequencies, the senior may find listening to women's and children's voices more difficult as they tend to have higher-pitched voices.

■ **Poor speech discrimination:** Due to high-frequency hearing loss, the senior may hear something being spoken but is unable to decipher the words. He may feel that other people are mumbling or not speaking clearly.

■ **Difficulty in hearing in noisy environments:** The senior may be able to hear when in a quiet room and facing the speaker, but not in a crowded place. He may also have difficulty using the phone.

What are the consequences if a senior's hearing issue is not treated?

■ **Communication breakdown:** When a senior cannot hear what is spoken, he may not be aware of the messages conveyed by others. As a result, family members may raise their voices impatiently, which may lead to misunderstanding and tension within the family.

■ **Social isolation and depression:** Difficulties in hearing in crowded environments may lead to the senior avoiding social activities that could otherwise keep him engaged mentally and emotionally.

The senior may also stop participating in conversations to avoid the problems of

communicating entirely, which could lead to social isolation and depression.

■ **Physical inactivity:** Hearing is not the only sense to deteriorate with age. Often, vision also becomes impaired. Having both eyesight and hearing problems may cause a senior to become socially reclusive and homebound.

This also leads to a vicious cycle of doing less physical activity, which would otherwise have helped to keep him healthy.

Why should seniors get their ears checked?

Many elderly patients tell me that hearing loss is "part and parcel of growing old".

They do not realise that social communication is even more vital in the senior years to keep them active and mentally alert. Dementia has now been suggested in many studies to be aggravated by hearing loss.

Keeping our seniors actively engaged in activities and physically independent requires that all their senses are functioning well.

Seniors aged 60 years and above should go for functional screening for hearing, eyesight and oral health yearly.

The hearing checks can help to detect early age-related decline in hearing loss. Follow-up treatment or hearing aids may be recommended for those with hearing issues.

With appropriate education and intervention, seniors can enjoy good hearing throughout their golden years.

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This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.



Functional screening for Singaporeans aged 60 and above

3-In-1

One-stop screening to check your eyes, ears and mouth

Accessible

Nationwide screening in the community

Affordable

Low fee of \$5 or less for eligible Singaporeans

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GET SCREENED EARLY

WHAT:

- Project Silver Screen (PSS) offers functional screening for hearing, eyesight and oral health at subsidised rates to Singapore citizens aged 60 and above.
- It is a partnership between the Ministry of Health, Temasek Foundation Cares and the business community.

HOW MUCH:

- Free for Pioneer Generation card holders, \$2 for Community Health Assist Scheme card holders, \$5 for all other Singapore citizens.
- If you require follow-up treatment, you will be referred to the relevant healthcare services.
- Need-based subsidies are available for all treatments. You may also receive PSS vouchers of between \$15 and \$200 if you require aids such as spectacles, hearing aids and dentures.

WHERE AND WHEN:

- For more information and functional screening schedules, visit www.projectsilverscreen.sg or call the Singapore Silver Line at 1800-650-6060 (Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm, and Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm, excluding public holidays).