

Audiology: Fact Sheet

Comorbidities and Risk Factors of Hearing Loss and Balance Problems

- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular Disease
- High Cholesterol
- Kidney Disease
- Dementia
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Thyroid Disease
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Noise Exposure
- Age (>40)
- Chronic Ear Infections
- Cancer
- Neurological Disorders
- Migraines
- Spinal Problems
- Cerebrovascular Accidents
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Medicinal
- Ototoxic Medications
- Vestibulotoxic Medications
- Smoking

What is an Audiologist?

Audiologists are health-care professionals who evaluate, diagnose, treat and manage hearing loss, tinnitus and balance disorders in children and adults.

Audiologists:

- Diagnose and treat hearing loss
- Diagnose and treat balance disorders (dizziness)
- Perform auditory electrophysiological surgical monitoring
- Design and implement hearing conservation programs and can provide custom hearing protection

Did you know?

- 80-90% of patients with hearing problems need only audiological services (10-20% may benefit from additional ENT specialty services, which audiologists are trained to properly identify and recommend. Audiological testing is typically a prerequisite to ENT consult.) Zapala, D., et. al. (2010). Safety of Audiology Direct Access for Medicare Patients Complaining of Impaired Hearing. *Journal of the American Academy of Audiology*. 21(6), 365-379.
- PCPs and CNPs can refer directly for audiology services (Your patients maintain their medical home, while saving time and money)
- Certain insurances, such as Medicare and Medicaid require a physician order/referral for hearing and balance evaluations

Who should be referred?

The beginning stages of hearing loss are difficult to recognize and the signs are often ignored. Early detection of hearing loss and potential causes (e.g., comorbidities and risk factors listed) can lead to counseling and treatment to help slow or prevent progression. Patients reporting dizziness and/or balance problems should be assessed to rule out a vestibular cause.

Treatment

Untreated hearing loss is linked to cognitive decline, depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, decreased job performance and earning power, and even increased risk of developing dementia. Balance problems and dizziness need to be assessed and diagnosed before they are properly treated. When left untreated, balance problems can negatively affect many different aspects of your life, including maintaining independent living. If your patient reports balance problems and/or dizziness, the first step involves a balance assessment to determine the cause. The audiologist will develop an audiologic treatment plan, which may include amplification and vestibular rehabilitation.