AGING AND HEARING LOSS

How do I know if it is a hearing loss?

The National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders suggests asking the following questions:

• Do you have a problem hearing over the telephone?
• Do you have trouble during a conversation when people talk at the same time?
• Do people complain that you turn the volume of the radio or television too high?
• Do you strain to understand the conversation?
• Do you have trouble hearing when there is background noise?
• Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?
• Do many people seem to mumble or not speak clearly?
• Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?
• Do you have trouble understanding women and children?
• Do people get annoyed because you misunderstand what they are saying?

A "yes" answer to three or more of these questions means a doctor should be consulted. To take a quick screening test for hearing loss, go to: www.audiology.org/consumer/guides/hhqt.php.

What should I do if I suspect a hearing loss?

• Make an appointment with a physician who specializes in ear, nose and throat disorders.
• If medical treatment is not possible, a referral to an audiologist is the next step. An audiologist will determine the extent of the hearing loss and make recommendations.

To learn more about the hearing test go to http://www.audiology.org/consumer/guides/uya.php.

What are the causes of hearing loss?

Hearing loss can be caused by:

• Noise  • Aging-related changes  • Medication  • Injury  • Heredity  • Medical infections  
• Excess earwax  • Middle ear infections  • Tumors  • Medical conditions (diabetes, Meniere's disease, tinnitus)
How can a hearing aid help a person with a hearing loss?

A hearing aid is an electronic device designed to make sounds louder. It collects sounds from the environment, amplifies the sounds and then directs a louder signal to the person's ear. Before purchasing a hearing aid, it is important to remember:

- Have a medical evaluation and hearing test to rule out medical treatment
- Contact the Minnesota Department of Health to determine which hearing aid dispensers are licensed by the state
- Be an informed consumer. Ask questions when clarification is needed. Some questions may include:
  - What is the cost of the hearing aid?
  - What guarantees or warranties come with the hearing aid?
  - How long do the guarantees or warranties last?
  - How much will servicing the hearing aid cost?
  - Do you provide a loaner if a hearing aid needs repairing?

Remember, one type or brand of hearing aid DOES NOT work for everyone. It is important to have choices when selecting a hearing aid. Also remember that although hearing aids help many people, no hearing aid will restore your hearing to "normal".

How can I communicate with a person who has a hearing loss?

- Converse in a quiet and well-lit area
- Avoid standing in front of bright lights or windows
- Get the person's attention before talking
- Do not eat, smoke, chew gum or cover your mouth when you talk
- Speak clearly
- Maintain eye contact
- Use facial expressions and gestures
- Introduce one idea or fact at a time
- Rephrase your message
- Do not assume a person can hear and understand what you are saying just because he or she wears a hearing aid
- Ask the person what you can do to help improve the communication process

What are the possible consequences of an untreated hearing loss?

- Decreased self-esteem
- Loss of independence
- Depression
- Less social interaction
- Increased worry and anxiety
- Paranoia
- Isolation
- Communication difficulties with family and others
MINNESOTA STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

SIGNS OF VISION LOSS

Early vision loss may not be recognized because:

Age-related vision problems develop slowly.

Warning signs are often misunderstood or ignored.

Older people, and sometimes their families, are often reluctant to admit problems.

Several behaviors may signal vision loss. Sometimes, others might notice these changes in us before we do. Lighthouse International publishes the following list of warning signs that may indicate sight loss:

- **Changes in reading habits**, such as holding material very close to the face or at an “odd” angle, squinting, and insisting on more light. Failure to read letters, a sharp reduction in the amount of reading, or sitting unusually close to the television may also signal a problem.

- **Changes in the ability to adjust from light to dark**, such as going outside into bright sunlight, or an increase in the discomfort experienced as a result of glare.

- **Changes in the ability to recognize familiar faces** or to distinguish changes in the appearance of family or friends (i.e. a haircut, a new mustache, new earrings, or glasses). An individual who no longer greets familiar people by name may be having trouble recognizing them.

- **Changes in grooming habits**, such as stains on clothing, mismatched clothes, unironed clothes, and uncombed hair. As some grooming tasks become more and more difficult, the older person may stop doing them altogether.

- **Changes in orientation or increased confusion**, especially in familiar areas, hesitancy in movement, stumbling, bumping into things (i.e. people or furniture), and fumbling for doorknobs. Reduced vision and the mobility problems that it can cause may lead to a reluctance to go to unfamiliar places. The person may also hesitate or refuse to continue to go to familiar places outside the immediate environment.

- **Changes in the ability to locate or recognize “small” objects**, such as glasses, a watch, jewelry, or keys. A person experiencing reduced vision may grope for objects, misjudge distances between objects, or touch objects tentatively or in an uncertain way.
- **Changes in eating habits and table manners**, such as spilling food, knocking over cups or glasses, lowering the face close to the plate, or asking for items already on the table. The anxiety caused by eating difficulties created by a vision problem may lead an individual to eat less, appear less interested in food, or prefer to eat alone.

Aside from noticing these changes, there are some simple “tests” that you can do. While an eye doctor is the only person who can diagnose eye diseases and conditions, these exercises are a quick ways to assess your own vision. There are exercises to assess your near vision and screen for glaucoma are available, and the Amsler Grid is a quick screening tool for macular degeneration. Go to the SSB website for links to these exercises. Although these “tests” may point to problems, you should always bring your concerns to your eye doctor.