

What is Listening Fatigue?

Hearing loss leads to communication difficulties. To maintain optimal understanding, listeners with hearing loss must allocate more cognitive resources, or brain power, to listening than do listeners without hearing loss. This increase in cognitive resources required to listen to speech has been referred to as an increase in listening effort. Cognitive resources are not unlimited; using additional cognitive resources to listen leaves fewer resources available for other tasks. For example, to maintain optimal understanding in a challenging situation, persons with hearing loss may need to shift more resources from other ongoing cognitive tasks (e.g., visual processing or memory rehearsal) than individuals without hearing loss, potentially impacting ease of communication (Hornsby, 2013).

Why Does Fatigue Occur?

A person with normal hearing does not usually experience this type of fatigue. The auditory system functions as it should and the brain processes the information easily. When hearing loss is present, the brain has to compensate for the loss and work harder than before to process the same information, causing stress on the brain and finally fatigue.

How to Reduce Listening Fatigue?

- Have your hearing professionally evaluated, diagnosed, and managed by a licensed audiologist.

- The use of appropriate clinically fit hearing aids may reduce listening effort and susceptibility to mental fatigue
- Use your hearing aids or other hearing devices during all your waking hours
- Reduce the background noise in your environment or employ specific communication strategies to reduce the effects of background noise
- Have quiet time during the day. i.e. reading instead of watching TV

Role of Audiologists

Audiologists identify, diagnose, and provide treatment options for patients with medication-related hearing loss and dizziness. They work closely with physicians and are an important part of the management team.

Do you think you or your child may have a hearing loss? Click on the "Find an Audiologist" link at www.audiology.org to locate and set up an appointment with an Audiologist in your area.

Reference

Hornsby, B. W. (2013). The effects of hearing aid use on listening effort and mental fatigue associated with sustained speech processing demands. *Ear and Hearing, 34(5)*, 523-534.