

SPREADING SMILES FROM EAR TO HEAR

Hearing Healthcare News Written for the Most Trusted Physicians in Toronto & Mississauga by Smiles From Ear to Hear.



Scan to Visit Our Website!

New Study: COVID-19 Increases Hearing Loss Risk by over 3 Times in Young Adults

Written by Demetra Valente



COVID-19 has been widely recognized for its impact on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, but recent studies suggest that it may also pose a risk to the auditory system, particularly in young adults.

Recent data highlights a concerning association between COVID-19 and an increased incidence of hearing loss and sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSNHL) among young adults. In this article, we'll explore this further.

A Surprising Rise in Hearing Loss

A large-scale cohort study published in *The Lancet's eClinicalMedicine* examined the health records of over 6.7 million young adults in South Korea, ages 20 to 39, comparing those who tested positive for COVID-19 to those who did not.

The study found that the incidence of hearing loss was 3.44 times higher in individuals who had contracted COVID-19 compared to those who had

not. Similarly, the risk of SSNHL was 3.52 times higher in COVID-19-positive patients.

The study highlighted that this increased risk persisted even after accounting for factors like age, sex, income, comorbidities and vaccination status. Interestingly, even young adults without traditional risk factors—such as smoking or chronic health conditions—showed elevated risks.

These findings challenge previous assumptions that hearing loss related to COVID-19 primarily affects older adults or those with preexisting conditions.

The study's lead authors, Hye Jun Kim and Seogsong Jeong, noted that the elevated risk could not be mitigated by vaccination, suggesting that the virus itself rather than other related factors may directly influence auditory function. While the study could not establish causality, it provides robust evidence of a significant correlation that warrants attention.

Further supporting these findings, *The Washington Post* reported on similar trends, citing data that the risk of hearing loss was significantly higher among young adults who had contracted COVID-19. The authors, including Dr. Michelle Suh, an otorhinolaryngologist, observed an unexpected surge in hearing loss cases in young adults at her clinic, prompting the need for larger studies to better understand this phenomenon.

In Summary

These findings serve as a critical reminder to consider hearing loss as a potential complication in young patients recovering from COVID-19. As we continue to navigate the long-term consequences, if you have any patients that are experiencing hearing changes following COVID-19, then please know that we are here to help, assist and support you.

Apple Launches 'Hearing Aid Features' in 100+ Countries

What This Means, and Will It Reach Canada?

Have you seen the news?

After closely following the rumours and updating you throughout the course of the year, Apple has finally launched their "Hearing Aid Capabilities" in 100+ countries.

As part of their latest iOS18 software update, specific users are able to access new features that allow them to utilize their AirPods Pro 2 earphones to conduct simplified self-assessment hearing tests and use over-the-counter hearing aid features to hear better in certain environments.

Naturally, when tech giants like Apple launch hearing aid capabilities and put their advertising/brand behind promoting these features on an international level, it raises questions and sometimes causes confusion.

With these features not yet reaching Canada and many unknowns, I want to share what we know about these features and what it may mean for your patients.

What Specifically Are Apple's Hearing Aid Features?

In August 2022, the FDA finalized regulations for over-the-counter hearing aids in the USA to allow consumers to purchase hearing amplification devices without the need of a professional.

From connecting with many of my US peers, it appears that many large tech brands have launched purpose-built devices over the past 48 months, but they haven't been adopted by the market, with some of the large brands pulling their products and stopping development.

There was always anticipation for when Apple would enter the market, and it's through the USA over-the-counter hearing aid route that these features have been launched there, and different company legislation has allowed them to launch in 100+ other countries.

There are three prominent features being launched:

1. Active Hearing Protection – This is a built-in defence mechanism to minimize loud sounds focused on protecting the hearing of the user.
2. A clinical-grade hearing test feature based on pure-tone audiometry that users can take themselves through an iPhone or iPad.
3. Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aid mode features that allow users with a mild-to-moderate hearing loss to use their AirPods to support them in challenging listening environments.

Will This Reach the Canadian Market?

Within minutes of Apple's announcement, details of the new AirPods appeared on Apple's US website, German website and Japanese website but have not appeared on the Canadian version of the website.

With Canada having no guidelines for over-the-counter or self-prescription hearing devices, it naturally means that the launch of these features is not as straight forward as other parts of the world, and there will either be a government fight right now or they will have accepted that Canada is not a market where these services will be released.

At this stage, there are many unknowns, but consumer demand may play a key role depending on the success of these features in other parts of the world.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

As you know, one of the biggest challenges in the hearing care industry is that, while many people regularly have their eyes tested and undergo annual physicals, very few people have their hearing tested regularly.

Apple's entrance into the hearing care market is set to change this.

Having the world's most influential tech brand drive their marketing machine into raising awareness for hearing abilities, hearing health and the lack of people that correctly care for their hearing is going to do a lot of good for the wider hearing health community.

However, it creates a short-term conundrum.

In the US, there are already media headlines suggesting that Apple has launched "hearing aids," which is leading to confusion and the misconception that these features offer the same functionality and performance as prescription hearing technology.

This could result in individuals delaying proper treatment, not addressing the correct hearing challenges or misunderstanding the capabilities.

Given there is so much changing so quickly, I'll keep you updated through this newsletter, but if you want faster access to information/opinions, then please drop me an email directly at info@smilesfromeartohear.com and I'll keep you updated more regularly.

Who are Smiles From Ear to Hear?

Our reputation is built on a heartfelt, family-focused approach that nurtures your overall health and wellness. Our compassionate team is devoted to helping you achieve optimal wellbeing through personalized solutions crafted just for you. Your journey with us begins with our signature '360 Wellness Examination'—a thorough, multi-point evaluation ensuring a holistic treatment plan tailored to your needs.



SMILES FROM
EAR TO HEAR

How to Contact Demetra at Smiles From Ear to Hear?

@ demetravalente@yahoo.ca

➔ www.smilesfromeartohear.com

☎ 416.590.9100