

Over-the-phone hearing test offered free through the end of June

Written by

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Are Americans warming up to a free over-the-phone hearing test developed by Indiana University researchers and funded by a grant from NIH? Better yet, the test is being offered free through the end of June.

"Many European countries and Australia already offer this kind of test," said Dr. Charles Watson, chief scientist for the National Hearing Test. "Nearly half of adults over 48 experience hearing loss, yet few seek help. The National Hearing Test lets them assess their own hearing by phone in the privacy of their own homes."

Left untreated, hearing loss can lead to job problems and income reduction, social isolation, embarrassment, and significantly lower quality of life. Hearing loss is irreversible, but if caught early, steps can be taken to keep its effects from worsening.

Within one month of the National Hearing Test's first major national push, more than 30,000 Americans have used the service.

Developed by hearing scientists with funding from the National Institutes of Health, the National Hearing Test is a quick and accurate hearing screening. To take the test, a person simply calls

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the toll-free National Hearing Test number at (866) 223-7575 and follows the directions provided. The test takes approximately 10 minutes.

The National Hearing Test is provided on a non-profit basis as a public service and has no financial connection with any hearing products or services. The test regularly costs \$8.

Communication Disorders Technology, Inc., launched the National Hearing Test, the country's first widely available phone-based test, to provide tens of millions of hearing-impaired Americans with a scientifically valid, affordable test to screen for hearing impairment.

The first test of its kind in the United States, the National Hearing Test overcomes many obstacles preventing people from being screened for hearing loss, including inconvenience and cost.

Hearing tests are currently either offered as "free" by hearing aid dealers with the cost of the test paid through the purchase of hearing aids or by appointment with an audiologist or by a physician specializing in hearing for a fee of up to \$150. The National Hearing Test is a not-for-profit project available to anyone by phone.

The National Hearing Test works by having callers listen to a series of spoken three-digit numbers ("3-5-1") presented with a noise background. When the caller enters the numbers correctly, the next numbers are presented at a lower, more difficult level. "Research shows that early intervention in hearing loss leads to better quality of life and greater success with hearing aids," said Dr. Watson, chief scientist for the test in the United States and professor emeritus of speech and hearing sciences at Indiana University, Bloomington. "Consequently, it's important for anyone who suspects they've suffered hearing loss to have their hearing tested and that a low-cost, convenient test be made widely available."

Dr. Watson stressed that, "While the telephone-administered test provides an accurate estimate of a person's hearing in the speech-frequency range, it is not a substitute for a full hearing evaluation by an audiologist."