

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues New Recommendation on Screening for Hearing Loss in Older Adults

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 14, 2012 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation on screening for hearing loss in older adults, finding that the current available evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for hearing loss in adults age 50 and older who show no signs or symptoms.

“Hearing loss is common in older adults, impacting 20 to 40 percent of adults over age 50 and more than 80 percent of adults age 80 or older,” stated Task Force member and co-vice chair Albert Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H. “There are several commonly used screening tools that can detect hearing loss before a person experiences any symptoms. However, it’s not clear whether people who don’t have symptoms, or those who have symptoms but haven’t sought evaluation of them, will benefit from early detection and treatment of hearing loss.”

It’s important to note that this recommendation does not apply to people who are seeking treatment for perceived hearing problems or for issues that may potentially be related to hearing loss, such as depression or memory problems. These individuals should still be assessed for hearing loss and treated as appropriate.

In its recommendation, the Task Force calls for additional research to fully evaluate the benefits and harms of screening.

“We want to help health care professionals better approach the problem of hearing loss in the future. To that end, more research is needed to define optimal screening guidelines. We also want to improve our understanding of the factors associated with sustained use of hearing aids to target testing and treatment to people most likely to benefit,” explained Dr. Siu.

The Task Force’s recommendations have been published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available.

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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