



ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS RELATED TO HEARING: SURVEY OF ADULTS AGES 40 AND OLDER

September 2023

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

An estimated [48 million](#) people in the United States live with a hearing loss. This includes half of adults ages 75 and older and one-third of adults 64–74. Hearing loss is the third leading cause of chronic illness after heart disease and diabetes in older adults. Age-related hearing loss is most often caused by changes to the inner ear, but other causes have also been noted such as underlying conditions or certain medications. It is thought that [age-related hearing loss and hearing loss due to long-term exposure to noise often co-occur](#).

While there are currently no known ways to prevent age-related hearing loss, individuals can reduce the chance of hearing loss due to exposure to loud noise by protecting their hearing using ear plugs or earmuffs and by avoiding or minimizing exposure to loud sounds. Sound is measured in decibels (dB), and it may be surprising what types of sounds can damage hearing. A normal conversation is typically 60 dB and prolonged exposure to sounds above 70 dB can damage hearing. Noise above 120 dB can cause immediate damage to hearing. A lawnmower generates noise at 80 to 85 dB and can cause hearing loss in about two hours of exposure. A loud sporting event at 100 dB can cause hearing [damage in 15 minutes](#).

Hearing loss has implications for overall health. Individuals experiencing hearing loss are at a greater risk of becoming depressed and withdrawing socially, which can lead to [loneliness and isolation](#). Hearing loss is also a risk factor for cognitive decline and dementia. It is estimated that eight in 10 (80%) hearing loss cases are treatable but the uptake on hearing loss treatment is low with only 25% of those who could be helped [getting treated](#).

In a [recent clinical trial](#), the benefits of a hearing intervention were documented in a group of older adults ages 70 to 84 with risk factors for cognitive decline. At the three-year follow-up to the intervention, the results showed that cognitive changes were reduced by 48%, including the loss of thinking skills and memory. No changes were noted in the healthy control group. These results highlight the benefit of addressing a hearing loss to potentially stave off cognitive decline.

[A previous AARP report](#) highlighted the intersection between brain health and hearing noting that individuals who highly rate their ability to hear also highly rate their brain health and have higher average mental well-being scores. This report highlights the attitudes adults 40 and older have about hearing health as well as their current engagement in protecting their hearing and what they are likely to do if they experience a hearing loss in the future.

Executive Summary

This report includes the results of a May 2023 survey that asked 3,500 American adults ages 40 and older about their attitudes concerning hearing health and hearing loss and any actions they would take should they experience a hearing loss, including the barriers to addressing the issue.

Adults 40 and older feel maintaining their hearing as they get older is important for their quality of life, but somewhat fewer think it's an important concern for them personally. Overall, fewer than half (47%) said hearing health is an extremely or very important concern for them, and eight in 10 (81%) said it is extremely or very important for their quality of life as they age. This finding suggests that adults know hearing health is important, but they aren't concerned about it. The improvement of their quality of life was noted by more than three-quarters (78%) as a motivator for seeking treatment for a hearing loss.

Despite the importance that hearing health has to quality of life, most adults rarely or never protect their hearing from loud noise. Over half said they rarely or never protect their hearing even while using power tools (55%) or loud machinery (57%). Over half (56%) said they never protect their hearing when attending events that feature loud music.

Most adults 40 and older with a hearing loss do not think they need treatment. Seven in 10 (69%) said their hearing isn't as good as it could be, but they do not feel they need treatment. Excluding adults who report excellent hearing, only one in six (15%) acknowledge a hearing difficulty that has been treated.

Most adults 40 and older know that a hearing professional is no longer required to get hearing aids. More than six in 10 (64%) are aware that hearing aids are now available over the counter, and about one-third (33%) said this would make them more likely to address any hearing concerns. The most important hearing aid features are that they are easy to use (77%) and covered by insurance (70%).

Adults cite key incentives and relatively few barriers to addressing any current or future hearing issues. However, one in five (19%) said minor hearing issues are easy enough to live with and half (51%) agreed that they can hear fine in some situations, so they do not need treatment. For adults who acknowledge an untreated hearing difficulty, the cost of treatment is a key barrier.

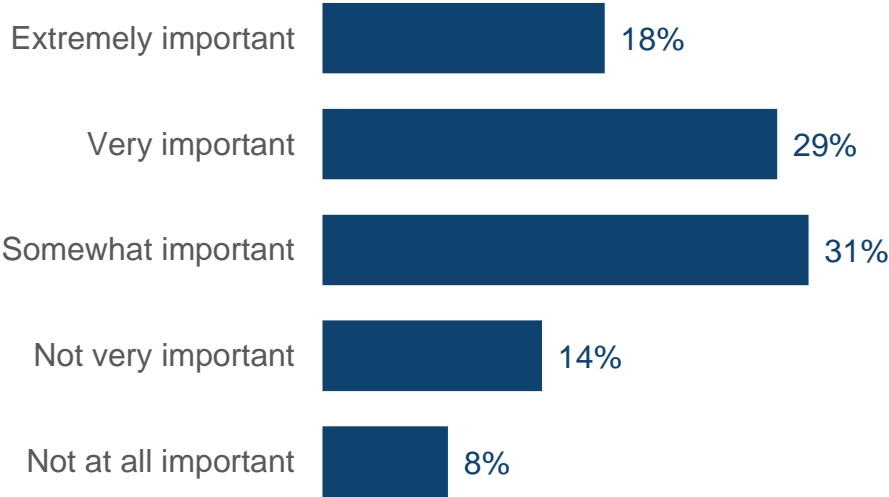


HEARING HEALTH

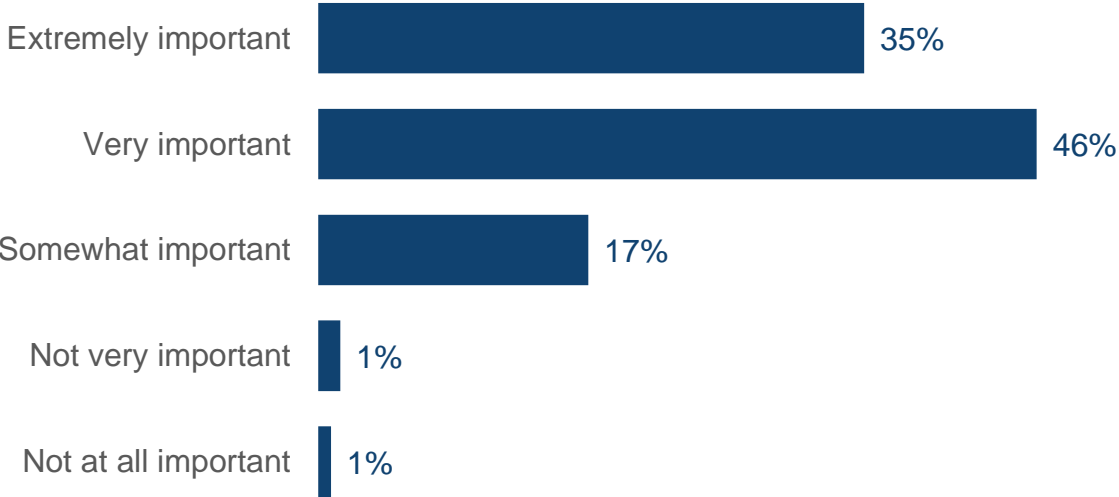
Hearing is important to adults' quality of life.

Nearly half (47%) of adults 40 and older say hearing health is an extremely/very important concern for them personally but eight in 10 (81%) say it's extremely/very important to their quality of life. This finding suggests that while they are aware that hearing health and quality of life go hand in hand, they aren't overly concerned about it right now.

Personal importance of hearing health
Among all respondents



Importance of maintaining hearing health as they age



Q17. In your opinion, how important of a concern is hearing health to...: Not a concern at all, Not a very important concern, Somewhat important concern, Very important concern, Extremely important concern

Base: All respondents, n=3,494)

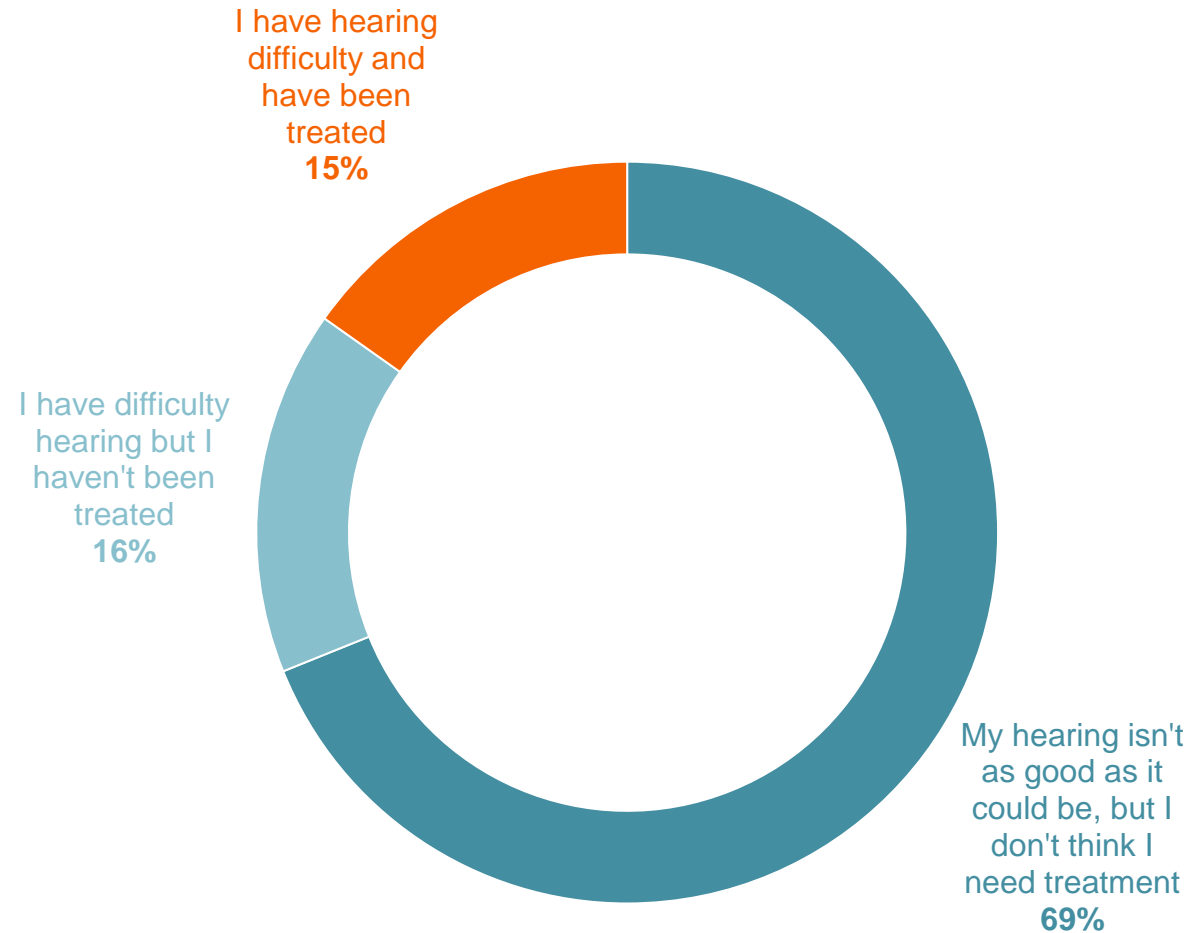
Q18. As you get older, how important is maintaining your hearing health to the quality of your life?

Base: All respondents (n=3,494)

Most adults 40 and older with a hearing loss do not think they need treatment.

Among a subset of adults ages 40 and older who indicate their hearing has declined, seven in 10 (69%) say their hearing is not as good as it used to be, but they do not think they need treatment. Another 16% acknowledge a hearing difficulty but have not been treated. Only one in six (15%) adults with suboptimal hearing have been treated.

Self-reported hearing health
Among adults who do not report excellent hearing



Q20. Which best describes your own hearing health?
Base: This analysis excludes adults with excellent hearing (n=2,042)

The fraction of adults who say their hearing is excellent decreases with age.

Four in 10 (42%) adults said their hearing is excellent. But, unsurprisingly, with increasing age comes a decrease in the percentage of adults reporting excellent hearing. Over half (52%) of adults in their 40s say their hearing is excellent compared to fewer than one in three (28%) adults in their 70s and beyond.

Percent who say their hearing is excellent
Overall and by age range



Q20. Which best describes your own hearing health?
Base: All Respondents (n=3,494)

Adults who report a hearing difficulty ask people to repeat themselves and have been told by others they have a hearing problem.

Overall, relatively few adults 40 and older have indicators from other people that they have a hearing difficulty. However, nearly half (49%) of adults who report a hearing difficulty — either treated or untreated — have been told by other people that they have a hearing problem.

Percent who said each of the following has happened to them, overall and by self-reported hearing ability

Situation	Total	My hearing is excellent	My hearing isn't as good as it could be, but I don't need treatment	I have a hearing difficulty, but I haven't been treated	I have a hearing difficulty and I have been treated
People seem to speak loudly to me so I can hear them	7%	1%	5%	22%	30%
People seem frustrated with me because they think I can't hear them	12%	1%	11%	36%	42%
People repeat themselves when speaking to me	18%	3%	20%	51%	46%
People have told me I have a hearing problem	15%	1%	14%	49%	49%
None of the above	71%	95%	67%	23%	27%

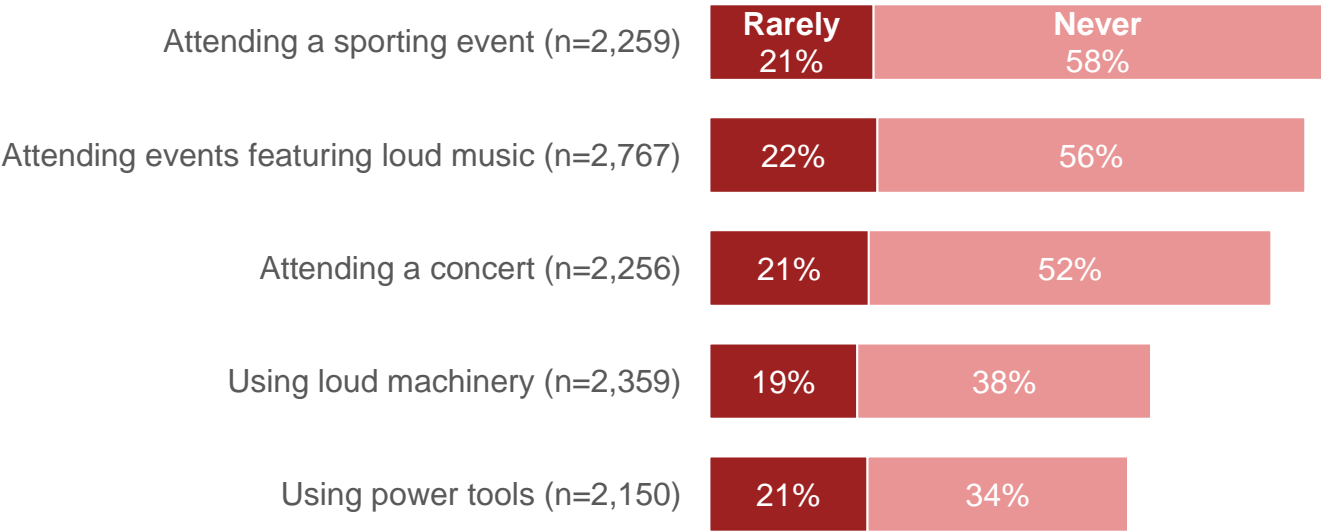
Q19. Which of the following, if any, have happened to you?

Base: All respondents (n=3,471)

Adults 40-plus rarely or never protect their hearing from loud noise.

Most adults 40 and older rarely or never protect their hearing during a sporting event (79%), an event featuring loud music (78%), or a concert (73%). Even when using loud machinery or power tools, most adults rarely/never protect their hearing (57% and 55%, respectively).

Percent who rarely or never protect hearing in the following situations
Among respondents who participated in each activity

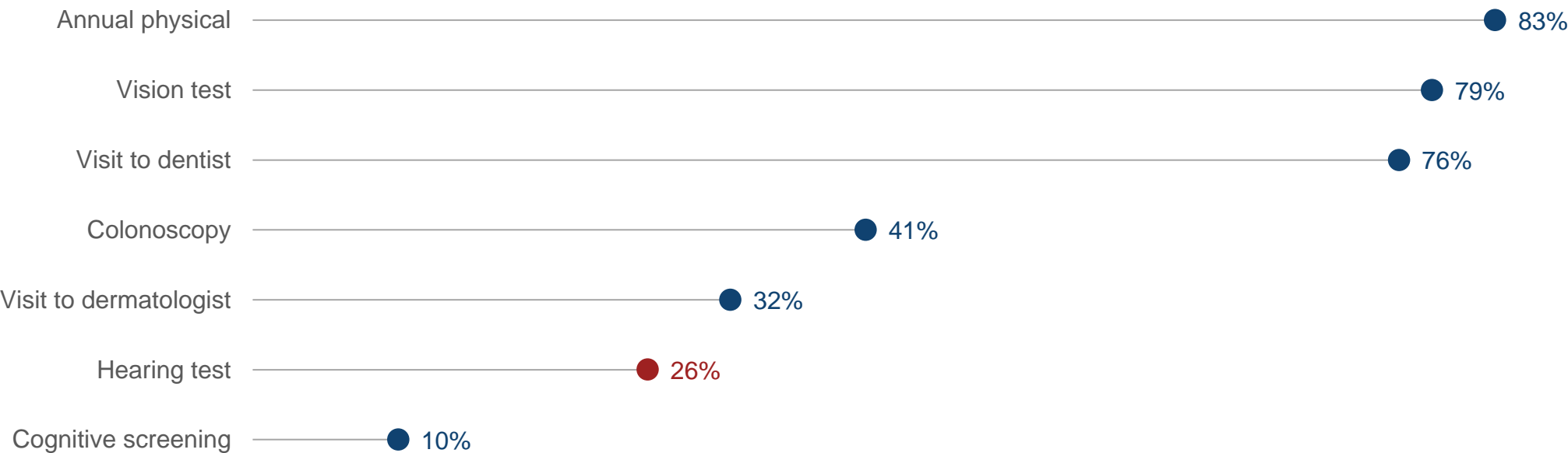


Q24. In the following situations, how often, if at all, do you protect your hearing using a device like earplugs, earmuffs, or noise cancelling headsets?
Base: Asked of all respondents, analysis excludes those who do not engage in this activity

Hearing tests are less common than colonoscopies.

Many adults 40-plus have engaged in some routine healthcare over the last five years. Annual physicals (83%), vision tests (79%), and dental appointments (76%) are common. Hearing tests (26%) and cognitive screenings (10%) are not.

Percent who have had the following health care in past five years
Among all respondents



Q16. Which of the following have you had in the past 5 years?
Base: All respondents (n=3,495)



HEARING AIDS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

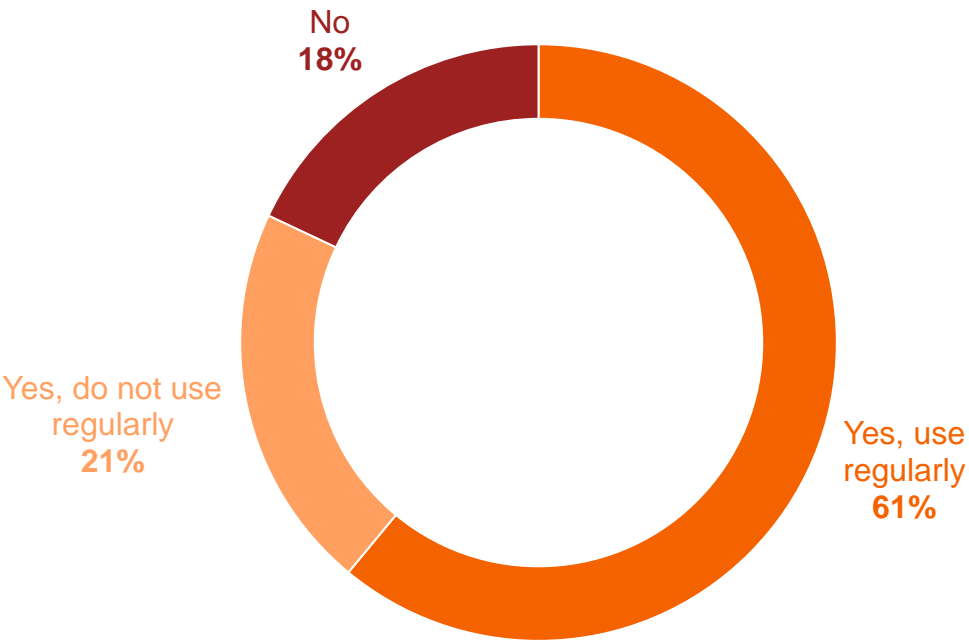
Most adults with a treated hearing loss use hearing aids regularly.

Among adults 40 and older with treated hearing problems, 18% report they do not wear hearing aids whereas 61% report doing so regularly.



Q21. Do you currently use a hearing aid or another device to help you hear? n=311

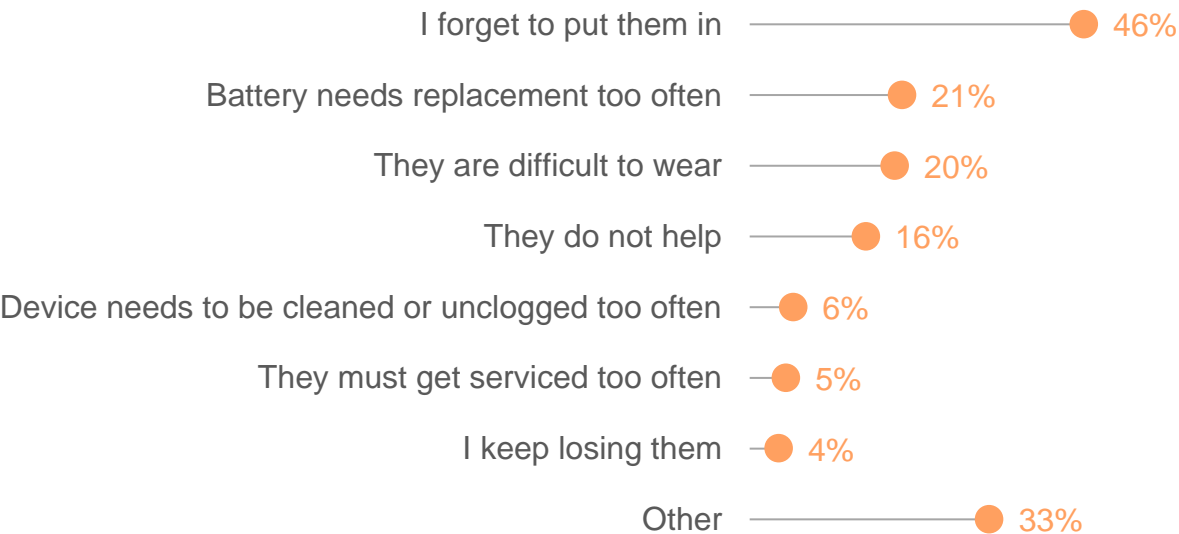
Use of hearing aid or other device to help them hear
Among adults with a treated hearing loss



Forgetfulness is the top reason for not wearing hearing aids.

More than four in 10 (46%) adults 40-plus with a treated hearing loss say they do not use their hearing aids regularly because they forget to put them in. One-third (33%) gave other reasons such as not needing them in all situations, they are uncomfortable, or it makes voices too loud. One in five (20%) said their hearing aids are difficult to wear.

Reasons for not using hearing aids regularly
Among respondents who have hearing aids but do not use them regularly



Other reasons people don't regularly use their hearing aids:

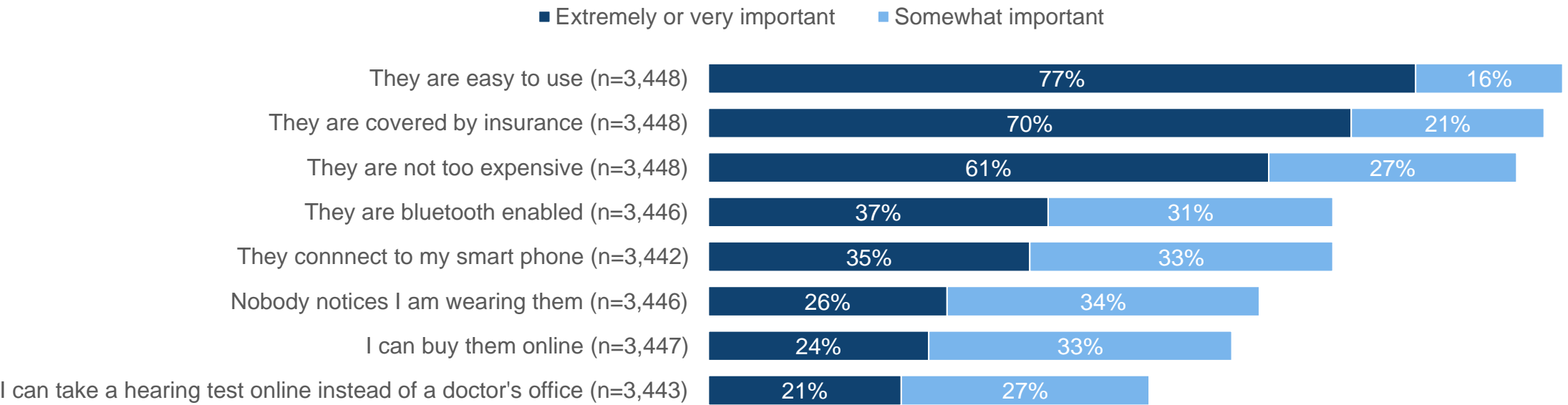
- Depends on the environment, don't need them in all situations.
- Don't use them when alone.
- They are uncomfortable.
- They make voices too loud.
- Need new ones.

Q22. For which of the following reasons do you not use hearing aids regularly?
Base: Respondents who have hearing aids but do not use them regularly (n=64)

The most important hearing aid feature is ease of use, followed by cost.

More than three-quarters (77%) of adults 40 and older said it is extremely or very important that hearing aids are easy to use, and seven in 10 (70%) said it's extremely/very important that they are covered by insurance. Fewer said it is extremely or very important to buy them online (24%), or it is important to be able to take a hearing test online (21%).

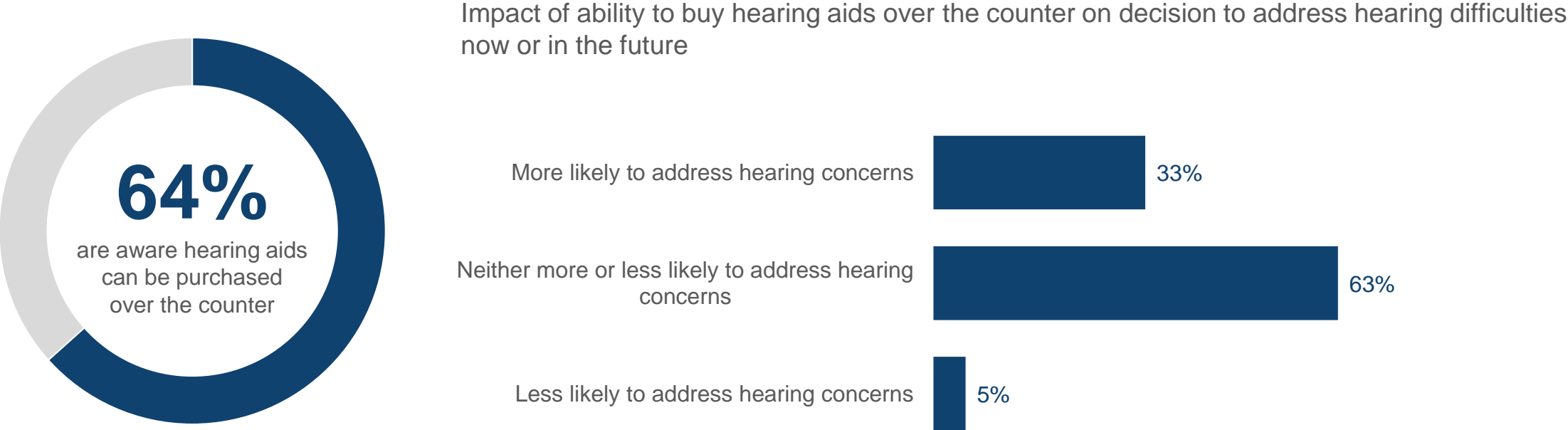
Percent who say the following are extremely, very, or somewhat important when using hearing aids
Among all respondents



Q35: How important to you, if at all, are the following when it comes to the potential use of a hearing aids? It is important to me that...
Base: All respondents

The ability to buy hearing aids without a prescription would not influence adults' decision to get treated for a hearing loss.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of adults 40-plus are aware that hearing aids are available over the counter. For some adults (33%) this availability would compel them to address their hearing concerns, but more than six in 10 (63%) said it doesn't make a difference either way.



Q31. Before taking this survey, were you aware that you can buy hearing aids over the counter? (n=3,496)

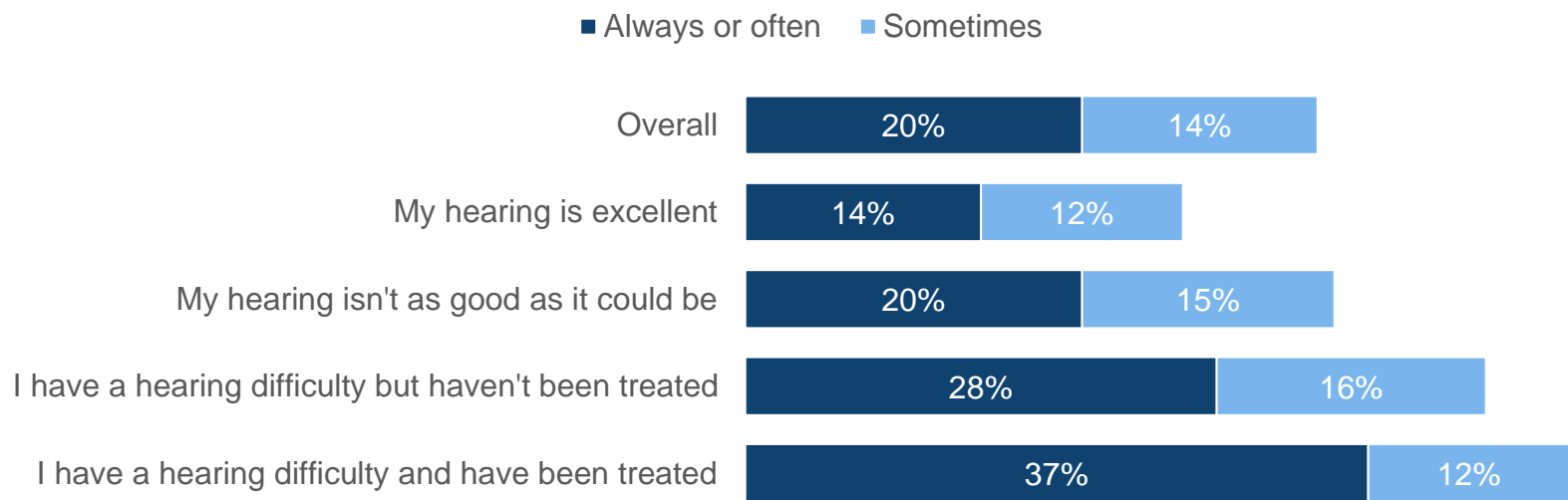
Q32. How, if at all, does the ability to buy hearing aids over the counter impact your decision to address any hearing difficulties you have now or may have in the future? I would be...

Base: Total Respondents (n=3,494)

Closed captioning on a TV or other device is sometimes used by adults with excellent hearing.

About one-third (34%) of adults 40 and older said they use closed captioning at least sometimes. Unsurprisingly, those with a hearing difficulty that has been treated (49%) or untreated (44%) are more likely to use this assistive technology. Adults without a hearing difficulty sometimes use the technology as well.

Frequency of using closed captioning on their TV or other device
Among all respondents, by hearing health



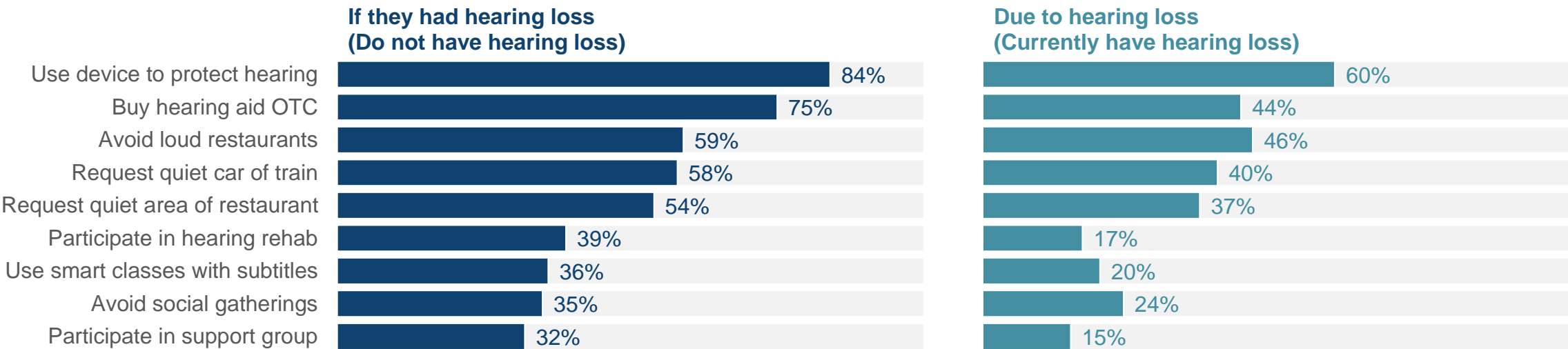
Q25. How often, if at all, do you use closed captioning on your TV or other device?
Base: All respondents (n=3,487)

Adults with a hearing difficulty are less likely to say they would alter certain behaviors because of it.

Adults 40-plus who are speculating about a future hearing loss are more likely to say they would adjust their behavior compared to adults who are currently experiencing a hearing loss. For example, more than eight in 10 (84%) without a hearing loss would use a device to protect their hearing compared to 60% who currently have a hearing loss.

Percent at least somewhat likely to do the following if they had hearing loss or due to hearing loss

Among respondents who do not have hearing loss and respondents who have hearing loss



Q33. How likely would you be to do the following if you were experiencing a hearing loss or some difficulty hearing?

Base: Respondents who report excellent hearing or hearing that is not as good as it could be (n=2,808)

Q34. How likely are you to do the following due to your experience with hearing loss?

Base: Respondents who report a hearing difficulty (n=611)



BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES TO ADDRESSING HEARING CONCERNS

Cost is a barrier to addressing a hearing difficulty among older adults who report an untreated hearing loss.

For adults who acknowledge a hearing difficulty, four in 10 (41%) said they could live with it, but one-third (34%) said treating a hearing issue would cost too much.

Which of the following might prevent you or has prevented you from getting help for a hearing issue?	Total	Excellent hearing	Hearing not as good as it could be	Hearing difficulty, untreated	Hearing difficulty, treated
Minor hearing issues are easy enough to live with untreated	19%	5%	30%	41%	12%
Treating hearing issues would cost too much	10%	4%	9%	34%	11%
My health insurance doesn't sufficiently cover the cost of treatment for hearing issues	9%	4%	9%	26%	13%
The insurance I have doesn't cover it	8%	5%	7%	20%	15%
I am so busy dealing with other health issues that I don't focus on hearing difficulties	6%	2%	7%	16%	6%
I am not sure where to go for information	4%	2%	4%	8%	1%
I am not sure what type of health provider to go to	3%	2%	4%	6%	1%
I don't have health insurance	3%	2%	4%	5%	1%
I don't think I have the physical ability I would need to successfully use a hearing aid or other device	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%
I don't have transportation	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%
I don't think I can keep track of what I need to do to use hearing aids successfully	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%
None of the above	64%	85%	53%	21%	64%

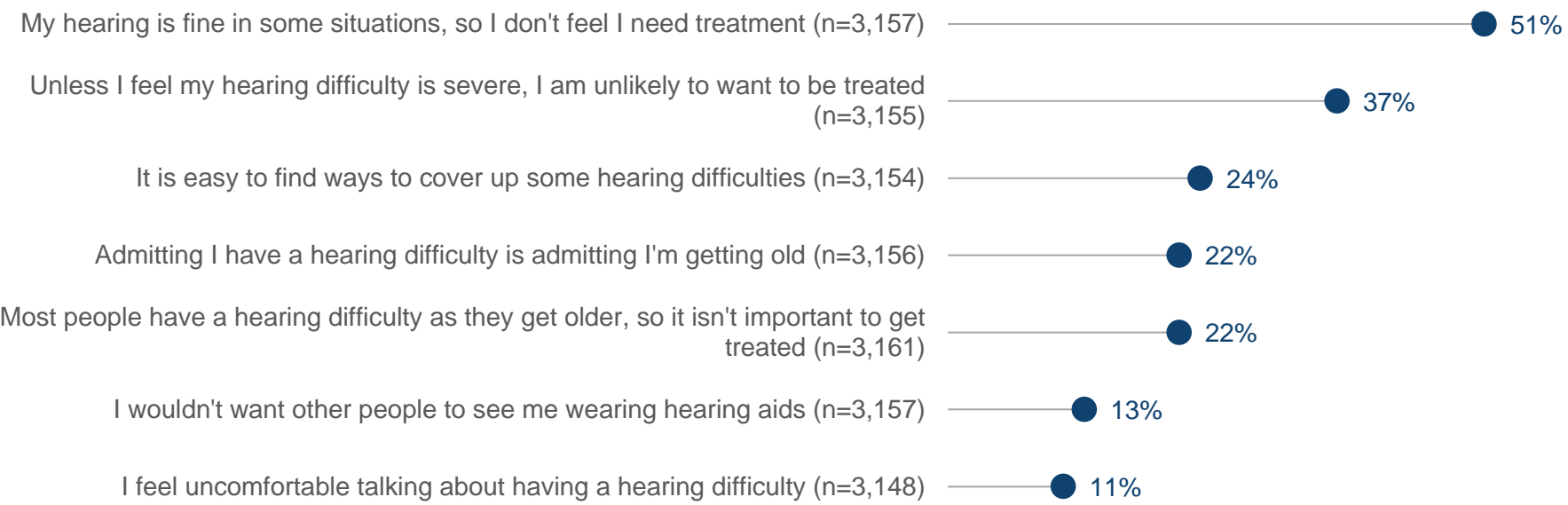
Q28. Which of the following might prevent you or has prevented you from getting help for a hearing issue?

Base: All respondents (n=3,476)

Most adults 40 and older feel their hearing is fine in some situations, and they do not need treatment.

When asked how they would feel if they had a hearing difficulty, relatively few (22%) adults agree that admitting they have a hearing difficulty is admitting they are getting old and one in 10 (11%) agree they would feel uncomfortable talking about having a hearing difficulty. Similarly, 13% wouldn't want others to see them with hearing aids.

Percent who agree with the following statements about hearing issues
Among respondents who do not have a hearing difficulty that is being treated

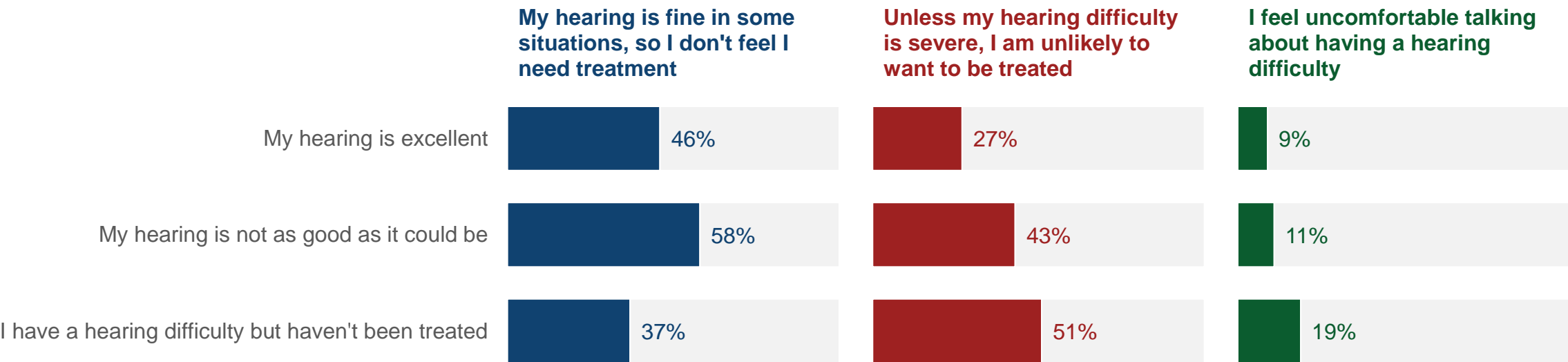


Q29. The statements below describe how you may or may not feel about having a hearing issue. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: Excluding respondents who report a hearing difficulty that is being treated

Those with an untreated hearing loss have significantly different opinions on getting treated and on talking about their hearing loss.

Significantly fewer (37%) adults with an untreated hearing difficulty compared to adults with excellent hearing (46%) and those who say their hearing isn't as good as it could be (58%) agree they do not need treatment because their hearing is fine in some situations. Additionally, significantly more (51%) with an untreated hearing loss agree they will not get treated unless their issue is severe. One in five (19%) said they are uncomfortable talking about their hearing difficulty.

Percent who agree with the following statements about having a hearing issue
Among respondents who do not report a hearing difficulty that is being treated, by self-reported hearing health

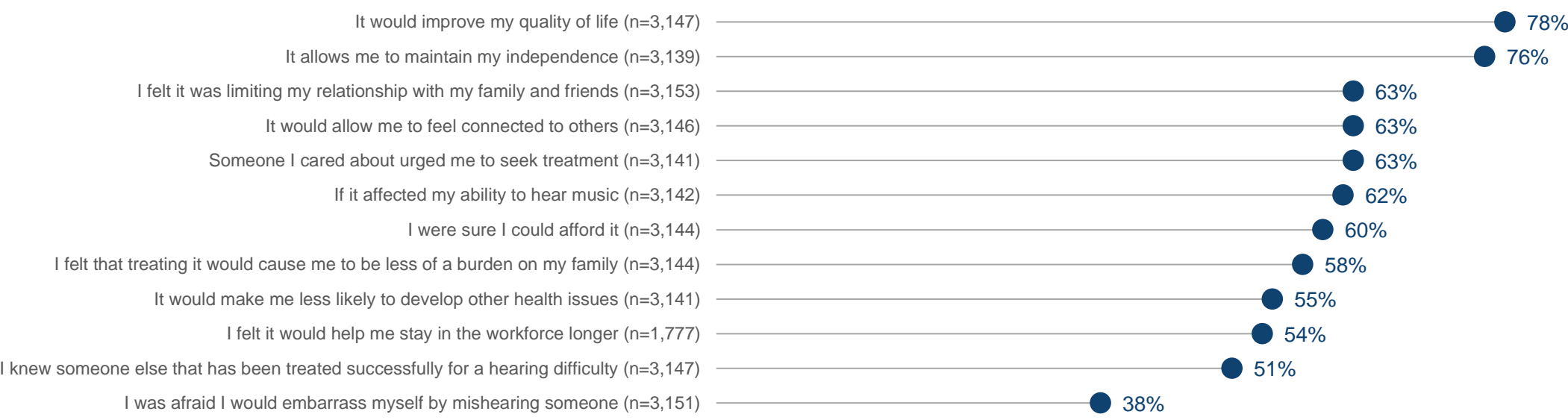


Q29. The statements below describe how you may or may not feel about having a hearing issue. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: Excluding respondents who have a hearing impairment that is being treated

Most adults 40 and older would treat a hearing loss to improve the quality of their life.

Quality of life as a motivator to address a hearing loss reflects an earlier finding that eight in 10 (81%) feel hearing health is extremely or very important to their quality of life as they age (see Slide 7). Other compelling reasons include maintaining independence (76%), urging by a loved one (63%), or if the hearing concern affected their ability to hear music (62%).

Percent who would be more likely to seek treatment if...
Among respondents who do not report a hearing difficulty that is being treated

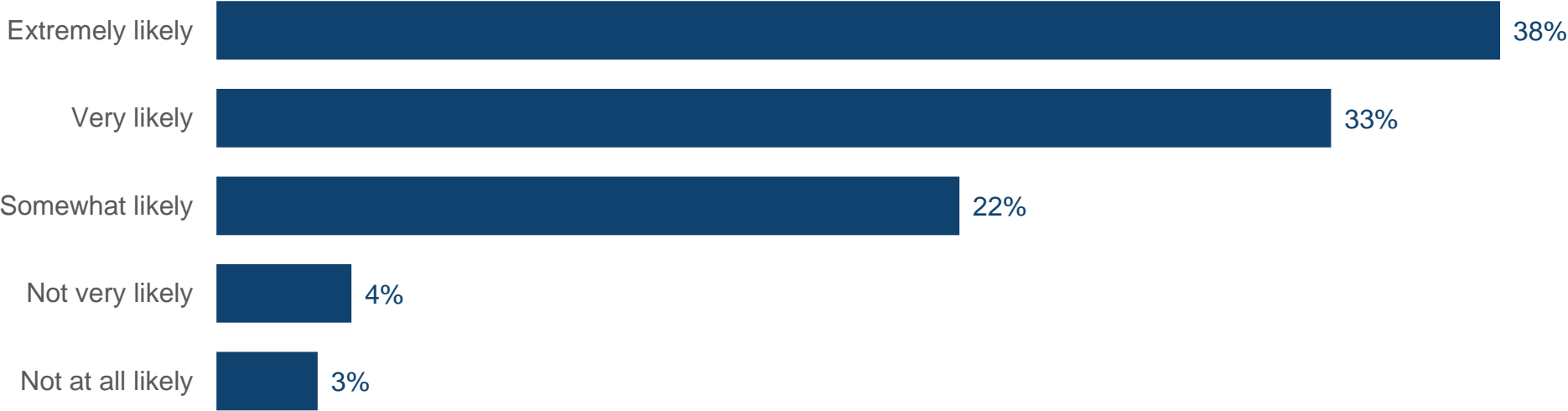


Q30. I would be more likely to seek treatment if...?
Base: Excluding respondents with a hearing impairment that has been treated

Most adults 40-plus would address a hearing difficulty if they knew it contributed to other potentially serious issues.

More than seven in 10 (71%) adults said they would be extremely or very likely to take care of any current or future hearing issues with the knowledge that it increases their risk of dementia, cognitive decline, depression, falls, and social isolation.

Likelihood of addressing hearing difficulties now or in the future if they knew that hearing loss increased the risk of dementia, cognitive decline, falls, and social isolation
Among all respondents



Q37. If you knew that hearing loss increases your risk for things such as dementia, cognitive decline, depression, falls, and social isolation, how likely would you be to address any hearing difficulties you have now or may have in the future?
Base: All respondents (n=3,494)



IMPLICATIONS

Implications

Most adults 40 and older realize the ability to hear is important to their quality of life as they age. But fewer say it is an important concern to them personally. This finding suggests that hearing health is not a concern for them now, but it is something they will worry about in the future. Because adults tend not to protect their hearing from loud sounds coupled with age-related hearing changes, dealing with hearing loss is a real possibility.

Fortunately, when predicting what they would do if they had difficulty hearing, adults cite several important incentives (such as maintaining their quality of life and their independence) that would encourage them to treat a hearing loss, and they cited very few barriers.

However, other research shows that people tend not to address their hearing difficulties. The cost to treat a hearing issue is a key barrier to seeking treatment. The lower-cost option of over-the-counter hearing aids may be a viable option for some people.

Prior research along with the results from this survey suggest that people of all ages need more information about hearing health and hearing protection, so they are better able to preserve their hearing for the future.





METHODOLOGY

Methodology

- **Objectives:** The purpose of this study is to understand brain health and hearing issues from the point of view of adults ages 40 and older.
- **Methodology:** Online nationally representative survey via Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, with sample targeting panelists age 40 or older.
- **Qualifications:** Age 40 or older.
- **Sample:** Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, n=3,512.
- **Interviewing Dates:** May 16–27, 2023.
- **Weighting:** The data are weighted for the 40 and older population according to the 2022 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS); language proficiency benchmarks are obtained from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).
- **Questionnaire length:** 20.8 minutes (median).
- **Margin of error:** Total sample: ± 1.7 percentage points.



A demographic overview

	Weighted <i>n=3,512</i>	Unweighted <i>n=3,512</i>
Gender		
Male	48%	50%
Female	52%	50%
Married	66%	69%
Household size:		
One	19%	18%
More than one	81%	82%
Education:		
Some college or less	64%	61%
Bachelor's degree or higher	36%	39%
Race/ethnicity:		
AAPI, Non-Hispanic	6%	4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	<1%
Black, Non-Hispanic	11%	10%
Hispanic	14%	12%
White, Non-Hispanic	67%	71%
2+ races, Non-Hispanic	1%	3%
Mean age	59.6 (years)	60.5 (years)
Median income	75–99.9 (000s)	75–99.9 (000s)

About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org/about-aarp/, www.aarp.org/español or follow [@AARP](https://twitter.com/AARP), [@AARPenEspañol](https://twitter.com/AARPenEspañol) and [@AARPadvocates](https://twitter.com/AARPadvocates) on social media.

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