



ENT Doctors Offer Tips for a Healthy New Year

Over 60 million Americans a year suffer from allergy and sinus problems, resulting in millions of medical visits. Approximately 17 percent of adults aged 20-69 years (approximately 26 million) have suffered permanent damage to their hearing from excessive exposure to noise. And more than 40,000 Americans are diagnosed with cancers of the mouth, head and neck each year. Each season can bring a variety of ear, nose, and throat maladies.

To stay on top of these everyday medical issues, otolaryngologists, the only medical doctors trained to treat all conditions of the ear, nose, and throat, recommend committing to these New Year's health affirmations:

1. I will protect my hearing: Turn the volume down

Most people are exposed to noise 365 days a year, but they can help their hearing health by turning down the volume when they listen to music, watch television, or use their cell phones. Over 20 million Americans already have suffered permanent damage to their hearing from excessive noise exposure. To gauge what noises can damage your hearing, go to the AAO-HNS website to try an interactive loudness scale - <http://www.entnet.org/healthinfo/hearing/Loudness-Scale.cfm>.

2. I will keep my nose and sinuses healthier: Know your nose

Stuffed noses aren't the only indicator of sinus trouble; sore throats, headaches, facial pain, and ear infections are often the result of poor sinus health, and can be prevented through good health habits. The biggest way to catch or pass along the bug that causes prolonged sinus problems is through dirty hands. Make it a habit to wash regularly before and after venturing out into public places. Daily sinus rinses can help keep your sinuses healthy. Also, many cases of congestion that result in sinus issues are viral in nature, and get better without antibiotics. So let your physician make the call on what the best treatments are for your symptoms.

3. I will reduce my risk of cancer of the mouth and throat: Tobacco and alcohol are catalysts

Nearly 13,000 patients will die from a cancer of the head and neck region and as many as 90 percent of head and neck cancers arise after prolonged exposure to specific factors. Use of tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, or snuff), especially when combined with alcoholic beverages, is closely linked with cancers of the mouth, throat, voice box, and tongue. Reducing or eliminating your use of tobacco products and excessive alcohol consumption will benefit your health significantly. New research is also just beginning to reveal the link between the common human papillomavirus and cancers of the mouth and throat. If you have a strange lump or sore in your neck or mouth, have it checked right away by an ENT physician.

4. I will eat right: Reflux affects more than your stomach

People may associate reflux disorders only with stomach pain. However, laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR) is different than gastroesophageal reflux disorder (GERD) and can impact on many other bodily functions. Symptoms such as burning throat, foreign body sensation of the throat, voice change, trouble swallowing, frequent throat clearing, and chronic cough may be caused by LPR. Reflux disorders can even interrupt your sleeping patterns or exacerbate asthma or croup. A healthy diet which avoids spicy foods and caffeine can reduce your symptoms, as can following healthy eating habits such as not eating within three hours of bedtime and eating smaller meals. Talk with an ENT physician about any reflux symptoms you might be having and follow a healthy diet to help reduce your symptoms.

5. I will take better care of my skin: Save your skin from the sun

Your head and neck are always exposed to the sun's potentially harmful rays. Overexposure to the sun can cause premature aging of the skin and even cancer. In fact, the most common head and neck cancer is basal cell cancer of the skin. Protect your skin by wearing sun-block every day, even in the winter. Wearing a hat can also help shield your head and neck from the sun's rays. If you notice any abnormal moles or marks on your skin, have a full examination by a physician.

Taking care of your ear, nose, and throat health can make a big impact on your 2010 health forecast. For more information and tips on monitoring these everyday health concerns, and for free patient education materials on otolaryngologic diseases, visit www.entdoctors.org.