



# Help a Loved One to Better Hearing





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## First you learn - then you can help



If you are reading this leaflet it is because you suspect that someone you care about might have a hearing loss. And you want to help. In order to do this, you need a clear idea of what it means to have hearing loss - how it affects family relationships and the way people feel, behave and communicate.

Hearing is an easy thing to take for granted. Occasionally we might miss a few words because we are not paying attention or it is noisy, but generally we move around effortlessly in different

environments, talking one-to-one, in groups, over the phone; listening to the radio or TV, without giving it a second thought.

Things are not nearly as easy with a hearing loss. It is difficult to converse in a crowded room or over the phone. It is not that things are not always loud enough, but that they are not clear enough. People often claim that there would not be a problem if others would just stop mumbling. Sounds fade so gradually that they can disappear unnoticed, for example when the birds stop chirping.

Left untreated, hearing loss can affect relationships between the person affected and their family and friends, quietly eroding their quality of life. That is why it is important to motivate your loved one to get their hearing tested and to take the necessary action, and to learn how you can help with any communication difficulties.

## The nature of hearing loss

It is important to understand the effects that hearing loss can have. Friends and family may be under the impression that the person with hearing loss has selective hearing. This is usually because some sounds come through clearly, but not others. The softer, high-pitched consonants (e.g. "s" and "f") become harder to hear than the stronger, lower, vowel sounds. And then gaps begin appearing in words and sentences.

At times these gaps might be easy to fill in, making it appear as though the person is hearing everything. But when things get noisy; when

they cannot rely on lip reading; when the talker is standing far away or the topic of conversation changes rapidly, the gaps will become so wide as to be impossible to fill in.

Then you will start to hear them say, "Sorry, could you say that again?" - a request that can be frustrating to satisfy in the long run. Or you will see them quietly withdrawing. If this should happen at family gatherings, parties, restaurants, try to step in and get them back into the conversation. Better still, try to get them to step into a hearing clinic.

**Did you know** that nearly one in two people over the age of 50 often has difficulty understanding what people say when it is noisy?

## Recognising the signs

**These questions will help you to make a quick assessment of the hearing of a loved one.**

	Yes!	No!
Do they complain that everybody seems to be mumbling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they have to strain to hear when someone talks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they have difficulty hearing when someone calls from behind or from another room?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they have to lipread to follow the conversation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they find it hard to follow a conversation in meetings, in restaurants or in lectures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they listen to the TV or radio at a frustrating, abnormally loud level?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they complain that people are mumbling when they talk on the phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they miss a lot of the dialogue when going to the theatre, cinema, or other entertainment venues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they have difficulty conversing in noisy environments such as a restaurant or a car?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they tend to be more quiet than normal when socialising because they are having difficulty communicating?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they often ask you to repeat things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Only a hearing test can confirm a hearing loss. If you care about your loved one, you should insist they have their hearing professionally tested. You could reassure them by suggesting that you would like to accompany them to their initial consultation.*

## Types of hearing loss - and their causes

The brief descriptions below give you an idea of the different types of hearing loss, and what causes them. For more information please contact your local hearing clinic.

### Age-related hearing loss

As we get older, some of us lose our ability to hear softer, high-pitched sounds. Birdsong is fairly easy to live without, but getting by when you lose some of the building blocks of speech is a far more challenging affair. It may creep up slowly, but eventually it will seriously affect the person's ability to communicate. That is why it should be dealt with as quickly as possible.

### Noise-induced hearing loss

This type of hearing loss is caused by overexposure to excessive sound levels. All over the world, people are encountering increasingly more sound. It threatens the hearing of military personnel, police officers, construction and factory workers, farmers, dentists and kindergarten

teachers - to name but a few. Rock concerts and MP3 players can also damage people's hearing.

### Conductive hearing loss

Conductive hearing loss is caused by problems in the outer and middle ear, which can prevent sounds getting through to the inner ear. The most common causes can be a build-up of wax in the ear canal, perforated eardrums, fluid in the middle ear, or damaged or defective ossicles (middle ear bones). In many cases this type of hearing loss can be treated medically.

### Sensorineural hearing loss

This type of hearing loss happens when the delicate sensory cells or nerve fibres in the inner ear get damaged. This stops them transmitting sound properly. The most common causes of sensorineural hearing loss are the natural process of ageing or excessive exposure to noise. This condition is in most cases permanent.

## Diagnosis and treatment



The first step towards better hearing is to visit a hearing care professional for a hearing test. This takes less than an hour and is completely painless. Since there is a lot of information to digest, offer to go along, because two memories are better than one.

If the hearing test shows signs of hearing loss, the next step is to find

the right solution. Although hearing instruments can never totally restore a person's hearing, they can usually restore their ability to communicate, which will improve the quality of life not only for them but also for the rest of the family.

In over 90% of cases of hearing loss, hearing instruments are the best form of treatment. People are often surprised to see that today's instruments look nothing like their predecessors. The "big beige bananas" of the past have been replaced by sleeker models that are as attractive as any other modern communication accessory.

Finding the right hearing solution also involves understanding what you can do to make communication easier. What solution the hearing care professional is likely to recommend will depend on the person's listening needs, lifestyle, personal preferences, and budget.

## Adjusting to hearing instruments

Once your loved one has been fitted with hearing instruments you must encourage him/her to be patient. You must be patient too. Amplified sound can be overwhelming and very tiring because the brain has forgotten certain sounds and has to learn to listen all over again. It's a bit like training a muscle that has not been used for a long time.

During the first few days it is important to wear the instruments as much as possible. As the brain gets time to adjust, the benefits will become more obvious, and before long your loved one will be wearing them all the time.

### What is in store

Getting used to hearing instruments is easier when your loved one and the whole family knows what to expect.

- *Hearing instruments cannot totally restore a person's hearing.*
- *Even with hearing instruments, noisy situations can be challenging (just like for the normal hearing person).*
- *The adjustment period varies from person to person and can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days, weeks or months.*
- *Initially, the volume might seem too soft or too loud. If it does, encourage them to have their instruments adjusted.*



## Communication is a two-way process

Hearing instruments alone may not enable the person with hearing loss to communicate successfully in all listening situations. With the following tips, family members and friends can do a lot to make listening and communicating easier:

- *Gain the person's attention before speaking, so they have an opportunity to look at you and focus on what you are saying.*
- *Speak clearly and at a natural pace. Remember not to talk loudly or shout.*
- *Move closer and sit or stand where your face is well lit to make your facial expressions and lips easy to read.*
- *Try not to talk while chewing or smoking.*
- *Never hide behind a newspaper or lean your cheek or chin on your hand while talking.*
- *Avoid talking from another room.*
- *If your loved one has difficulty understanding you, try rephrasing the sentence rather than just repeating yourself.*

- *In group situations, try not to interrupt each other.*
- *Avoid noisy doorways and windows; if you cannot close them, find somewhere quieter to talk.*
- *Reduce background noise i.e. turn down the stereo or TV.*

### When you are out and about

If you go to the cinema or theatre together, call in advance to check whether they provide assistive listening devices (systems that make it easier to listen with hearing instruments). When booking restaurants, try to get the quietest seats.

In meetings or at seminars, remind them to arrive early and sit at the front. And advise them to ask the presenters to use a microphone.

## What steps should you take now?

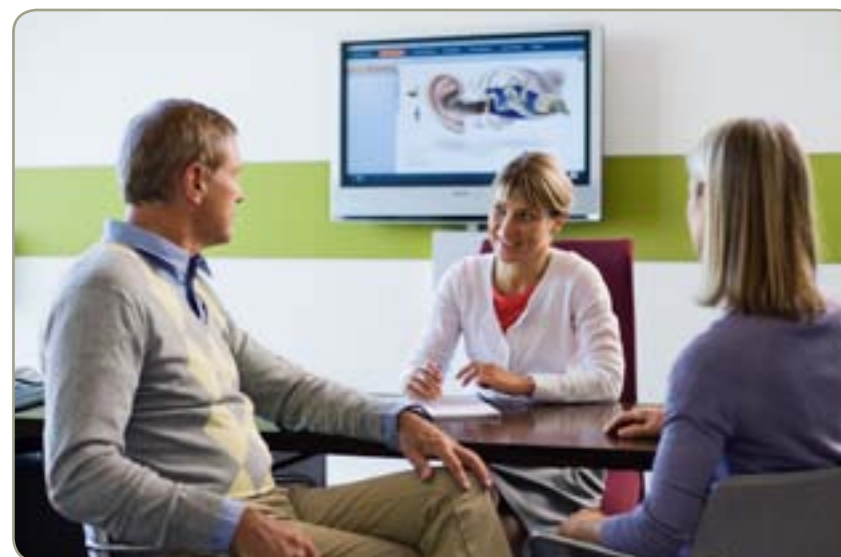
Gathering information is a great place to start. You can search the Internet for information on hearing loss, and share it with your loved one. If you can get them to acknowledge that they might have a problem, you will be well on the way to finding a solution.

Step two is to make an appointment for a hearing test. Point out that, as with most health conditions, the earlier you get a clear diagnosis, the

more successful the outcome is likely to be.

Once you get them to the hearing clinic they will be in excellent hands. And in the months to come, you can accompany them on their journey towards better hearing.

For more information, visit  
[www.hear-it.org](http://www.hear-it.org)  
[www.oticon.com](http://www.oticon.com)



## People First

People First is our promise  
to empower people  
to communicate freely,  
interact naturally and  
participate actively

Hearing Care Professional:

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