

LIVING WITH HEARING LOSS

TIPS, TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES



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While there are various causes, including illness, medication, noise exposure and wax blockage, in many cases, hearing loss is a natural part of aging.

Because hearing loss is an “invisible” condition, it is not recognizable simply by appearance. Consequently, most individuals are not aware of how prevalent hearing loss is. While people with hearing loss often feel isolated, there are millions of people facing the same challenges.

In total, about 17 percent of American adults – or 36 million people – report having some degree of hearing loss. But difficulty hearing is more common as people age. In fact, while only 18 percent of adults between the ages of 45 and 64 report being hard of hearing, 30 percent between 65 and 74 years of age and around 50 percent of adults 75 and older are living with hearing loss.

Recognizing hearing loss is often a gradual process. In many cases, the person experiencing it may not even be aware of it - others in their social circle notice it first. Statistically, the majority of people with hearing loss do not seek treatment immediately, often delaying the process for several months or even years. According to Susan Geffen, an attorney, author and gerontologist who focuses on senior issues, adults with hearing loss often struggle with taking the step of getting hearing aids, even when hearing is a challenge:

“Aside from the ego aspect of wearing a hearing aid, the main concern is that they will not be able to engage socially. Even going out to eat, which is a social activity, can be frustrating because the noise level can be quite high.” As a result, people with hearing loss often avoid situations where hearing is difficult, such as group settings or talking over the phone. Yet avoiding isolation by staying connected to family and friends is very important for overall health. Fortunately, there are some basic things you can do to maximize the hearing you have and continue to enjoy connections to family and friends for an independent, healthy and safe lifestyle.

HEARING LOSS TIPS

There are some easy things people can do in their daily lives and routines to manage their hearing loss and communicate more easily with others:

In the Home

- Minimize background noise. If you or someone in your family has difficulty hearing, turn off the television or radio while talking, and do anything else you can to control and reduce background noise.
- If you have hearing loss, make sure to face the person with whom you are speaking so that it is easy for you to speechread and interpret body language, which is often helpful in communication. Let your family members and friends know that they can help you out by always speaking to you face to face, rather than from another room.
- Be patient with yourself and others.
- Repeat what someone says back to them to make sure you understand them clearly.
- If you're comfortable doing so, let the person you are talking to know that you have hearing loss so they can help you by slowing down and facing you. Let others know how they can best help you.



IN THE OFFICE

Having hearing loss at work can be particularly challenging, but there are several ways to manage your hearing loss and feel comfortable in the workplace:

- Meetings can be difficult for those with hearing loss who depend on speechreading, especially when there are multiple people at the meeting. For successful work meetings, ask that they be held in well-lit rooms with round tables. This way, all faces are visible to you. If you have hearing loss, it's also helpful to ask for an agenda of the meeting and to ask a colleague for notes afterward to make sure you caught everything important.
- If you have hearing loss, make sure to ask for what you need. Some examples of accommodations for people with hearing loss can include having a desk in a quieter part of the office and providing a CapTel captioned telephone for phone duties.

ON VACATION

Hearing loss should not keep you from enjoying traveling to new places and taking in all of the sights and sounds. Here are some great tips for traveling with hearing loss:

- Contact the hotel in advance of your stay. While hotels are required by law to have specific accommodations for guests with hearing loss, you'll ensure the best experience for yourself if you notify hotel personnel in advance.
- Most forms of transportation these days are accessible for those with hearing loss. When you book your flights, you can likely choose to include your cell number to receive text updates if there are changes in the itinerary. Still, let flight attendants know about your hearing loss so they can communicate any special announcements to you in case you miss them.
- Before you travel, research which tourists sites offer loop systems, amplified headsets and other text-based or assistive listening devices.

HEARING LOSS TOOLS

There are simple in-home tools to help you be aware of the important sounds in your daily life.

CAPTEL CAPTIONED TELEPHONES

These phones are vital for staying in touch with friends and family members, as they show captions of everything a caller says. Users generally report that CapTel allows them to regain their independence and have meaningful conversations with their loved ones. CapTel eliminates the stress and anxiety of trying to hear over the phone, and takes away the embarrassment of having to ask people to repeat themselves. As Karen Dishno of Wisconsin explains, “I love being able to hear people’s voices and their expressions, and still have the captions there letting me read every word in case I miss anything.”

OTHER TOOLS

There are some excellent tools to help you stay safe and to alert you if there is an emergency:

- Signalers that flash a light to alert you to the doorbell, oven timer and other common household sounds.
- Bed-shaking alarm clocks, which typically have two important elements: an extra-loud alarm and an attachment that is placed under your pillow to “shake” you awake. The alarm can be turned off so as not to wake other people in your home.
- Smoke detectors with strobe lights, which are often combined with shaking features and extra-loud alarms.
- Bed-vibrating smoke detectors, which research has shown are successful in waking those with and without hearing loss in an emergency.

HEARING LOSS TECHNOLOGIES

Captioning technology has been around since the early 1970s, starting with closed captioning in television programs. The FCC sets rules and standards about closed-captioning.

- Television: Starting in 1993, all televisions are required to have closed captioning. Per FCC requirements, captions need to be very easy to turn off and on.
- Captioned telephones: CapTel phones use captioning technology that is free of charge for those with hearing loss. Simply push a button on your CapTel phone to turn on captions, which appear on the CapTel phone's display screen. You can listen to the caller while reading captions of everything they say.
- Movie theaters: Most theaters offer captioning options like rear window captioning, which is a portable device that can be used on any film at any time in movie theaters that offer the captioning technology.
- Online: YouTube has closed captioning and Netflix has captions for about 90 percent of its video library. The online video supplier will caption 100 percent of its content by 2014.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

It seems that helpful new technological advancements occur every day. One such technology that is making waves is Google Glass, which may have helpful benefits for those living with hearing loss. This advanced technology would allow people with hearing loss to “see” sound waves - alerting them to a nearby car honking, for example. Although this technology is still under development and currently very expensive, it reveals that technology is continually advancing and hints at the possible future development of even more innovative improvements for those with hearing loss.

CONCLUSION

There are many simple things you can do for yourself and family members in your daily lives to live well with hearing loss. There are also multiple easy-to-use tools and increasingly advanced technologies to help you enjoy your daily life to the fullest.

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