



Common experiences with hearing impairment

How many times do you ask someone to repeat what he or she has said to you?

Any degree of hearing loss, whether very mild or severe, affects communication for both the hard of hearing person and the person they are communicating with. Most hearing losses cause speech to sound less clear. Hard of hearing people often hear *part* of every word, but not *all* of every word, so they often believe that people are mumbling.

A person with a hearing impairment can feel embarrassed, frustrated, depressed and tired. Consequently, they may begin to lose confidence and withdraw from social situations. Friends or family of a hard of hearing person may also feel frustrated and embarrassed. These feelings can put a strain on relationships.

Using hearing aids and other listening devices can overcome some of the problems caused by a hearing loss. They can enhance communication ability, thus enhancing social activity and providing more confidence.

Communication can also be made more enjoyable and easier for everyone by using some simple strategies. Remember that communication takes two people, and both need to help each other for communication to be successful.

Strategies for hard of hearing people

Don't pretend you heard or understood something you have not. If you did not hear something clearly, don't nod or simply say "yes" and bluff your way through the conversation. This could lead to embarrassing and awkward situations and at times you may also appear insensitive or rude.

Constantly asking for repeats using statements such as "What was that?" or "What did you say?" can annoy your conversation partner. It can also make you feel frustrated and guilty.

Listed below are some other options you can use to improve communication between you and your conversation partner:

- Try repeating back part of the message that you heard, or letting people know exactly what part of their sentence you missed, for example, "You said you were going on holiday, where are you going to?"
- Ask questions with short or one-word answers (including yes/no questions).
- Ask for clarification for example "Was that 32 Gisborne Street?"
- Inform other people that you have a hearing loss. Ask them to speak clearly, a little slower, a little louder, and to stress key words.
- Think about the best position for communication and plan ahead. You can reduce the number of hearing difficulties you may encounter by:
 - Reducing background noise
 - Facing the speaker



- Improving the lighting on the speaker's face
- Moving closer to the speaker
- Ensuring the person(s) you want to hear are on your better hearing side
- Mentally 'fill in the gaps' by using what you already know about the topic of the conversation, or by asking questions.
- Ask people to write down the message if you still do not understand.
- If you are on the phone, ask people to spell out important words such as names or addresses. Clarify numbers by saying something like "Is that seven-zero, or seven-teen?"
- Be assertive. It is all right to ask to sit in a certain seat because of your hearing loss. People are usually very willing to help as long as you let them know the reason for your request.
- Investigate some of the devices and services that are now available to help hard of hearing people.
- Remember that nobody hears everything, even people with normal hearing, especially in noisy situations.

Strategies for family and friends

Talking to someone with a hearing loss can be frustrating at times, but it is very important to be understanding and patient. There are many strategies to help you communicate more effectively:

- Always speak face to face, and try to be at the same level, for example both standing or both sitting. Don't try to communicate from different rooms or with your back towards your communication partner.
- Get the person's attention by calling their name or tapping them before speaking to them.
- Avoid or reduce background noise by removing distractions such as TV's, radio.
- Make sure light is on your face – not behind you.
- Make sure your face is uncovered and do not chew food when speaking.
- Speak clearly, a little slower and a little louder. Stress important words.
- Use appropriate facial expressions and gestures.
- Mention the topic of conversation beforehand, and draw attention to any change of topic during a conversation.
- In a group, speak one at a time.
- If the person does not seem to understand what you have said, try to express the message in a different way instead of repeating it exactly.
- You can always spell out or write a message if it is very important.
- Investigate some of the services and devices that are now available to make life easier for hard of hearing people.



Hearing aids

Your audiologist or ear specialist can advise whether hearing aids would be helpful for your particular case. Hearing aid technology has advanced remarkably in recent years, and many of the complaints users have had in the past are no longer as much of a problem. Pensioners are entitled to hearing aid benefits from the Australian government through the Office of Hearing Services.

Phone: 1800 500 726

Website: www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-hear-applic.htm

Telephone

Telephone companies have an obligation to provide products for hard of hearing people. For example, Telstra and Optus have a range of products to make phone use easier. Contact your phone company and enquire about their disability equipment program.

Phone (Telstra): 1800 068 424 (voice), 1800 808 981 (TTY), 1800 814 777 (fax)

Website (Telstra): www.telstra.com.au/disability

Website (Optus): www.optus.com.au/disability

Expression Audiology

Have a large display of many useful devices for the hearing impaired. They also have a range of professional support services for people with hearing loss and tinnitus, and provide hearing aids at discount prices for low income clients.

Phone: 1300 302 031 for your nearest centre.

Website: www.expression.com.au

Better Hearing Australia Vic. Inc.

A self-help organisation for people with hearing loss.

Address: 5 High Street, Prahran VIC 3181.

Phone: 1300 242 842

Website: www.betterhearing.org.au

Word of Mouth Technology

Provides a wide range of devices for people with hearing loss.

Address: 2 Floriston Road, Boronia VIC 3155.

Phone: (03) 9761 2211

Website: www.wom.com.au

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