

Losing your hearing as you get older



About this leaflet

If you are over 60 and you think your hearing is not as good as it used to be, this leaflet may help you. It tells you:

- Why many people become hard of hearing as they get older.
- About signs of hearing loss.
- What to do if you think you have a hearing loss.
- About help you can get for your hearing loss.

Why do people become hard of hearing as they get older?

Many people become hard of hearing as they get older because of a condition known as presbycusis.

Presbycusis is due to the loss of specialised cells that are needed for the cochlea to work properly. The cochlea is the innermost part of your ear and it processes sounds for your brain to interpret. As you grow older, the specialised cells begin to die and you will eventually notice that sounds are not as clear as they used to be.

If you have difficulty understanding what people say to you this may be the first sign that your hearing is not as good as it was. You may hear people talking but think they are mumbling or not speaking clearly. Most people with presbycusis notice the 'high frequency' sounds disappearing first. Speech sounds with the highest frequencies are the consonant sounds such as 's', 'sh', 't', 'k', 'p' and 'f'. These sounds help us to make sense of speech.

So next time someone offers you a 'big kiss', make sure they are not really asking if you would like a biscuit!

Some people find it embarrassing or difficult to accept that they are becoming hard of hearing. In fact, it is a natural part of getting older. One in five of all adults, and more than half of people over 60, have a hearing loss.

If you are under 60 and you think you have developed a hearing loss, it is very important to see your GP (family doctor) about this. It is less likely to be presbycusis and you should have your ears and your hearing checked.



**More than half
of people over
60 have a
hearing loss**

Signs of hearing loss

Are any of these situations familiar?

- Do other people seem to mumble rather than speak clearly to you?
- Do people often have to repeat things for you before you understand what they say?
- Do you have difficulty understanding what is being said in noisy places, such as pubs or restaurants, although other people manage to have conversations?
- When you are talking to people in a group, is it hard to keep up with the conversation?
- Do you find it tiring to listen to conversations because you have to concentrate hard?
- Do other people think your television or music is too loud but you cannot hear it properly if they turn it down?
- Do you often have difficulty hearing on the telephone?

If any of these sound familiar, it is possible that you have a hearing loss.

What to do next

The thought of losing your hearing can be worrying. You might not want to think about it at all, but the sooner you do something, the better.

Your first step should be to visit your GP to have your ears checked. Before you go make a note of your reasons for thinking you have a hearing loss. Use the checklist we have given to help you think of times when you have had difficulty hearing. Describe your hearing loss to your GP and explain how you feel it affects your day-to-day life. You should also explain that you would like to know if something can be done to help you.

Your GP will look in your ears using an instrument called an otoscope to check for obvious problems and may be able to carry out simple tests with a tuning fork, or you may be able to have your hearing tested in their surgery. Usually, they will refer you to the audiology clinic or ear, nose and throat (ENT) department of your local hospital to have hearing tests.



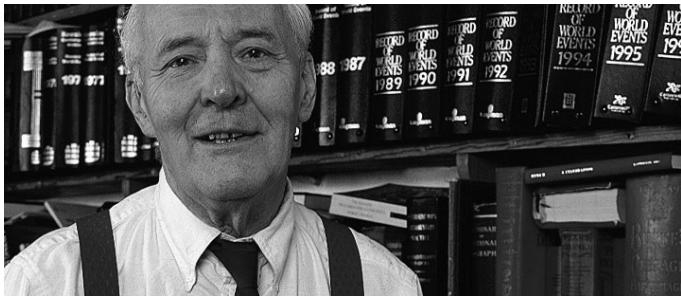
Do you have difficulty understanding what is being said in noisy places?

The hearing tests

When you get to the hospital for your hearing tests you will see a specialist called an audiologist. Before checking your hearing, the audiologist will look in your ears using an otoscope.

The hearing tests – also called audiometry – last about 20 minutes. The audiologist will ask you to put on headphones and listen to sounds of differing frequencies (pitch) and levels of loudness. These are like low, middle and high musical notes. One ear is tested and then the other. You have to press a button each time you hear a sound. The audiologist will make them gradually quieter to find out the softest sounds you can hear.

**Tony Benn says
his two hearing
aids help a lot**



The audiologist might also make the sounds louder to find out the level when they become uncomfortable for you to listen to. This gives important information and helps with setting up your hearing aid.

If your hearing test shows that you have a hearing loss, you will have another test.

The second test involves putting on a headband with a vibrating pad. This pad transmits sound through the bones of your skull to your cochlea in your inner ear, on both sides of your head.

While you listen for sounds from the vibrating pad, the audiologist might play a rushing noise into one ear to cover up the sounds on that side while your other ear is tested.

The results of the tests are drawn on a chart called an audiogram. When the results of the second test are compared with the headphone test, it shows up any problems you might have with your eardrum or middle ear. This helps to decide what can be done about your hearing loss.

You may be given another test where you listen to sentences or words and repeat what you hear. This shows how much your ears are distorting sounds.

The audiologist will explain your test results and discuss whether a hearing aid is likely to help you, or if you could have some other treatment. Occasionally, you will be offered further tests.

Help you can get

Remember that you don't have to hide or put up with a hearing loss. It should not stop you from socialising or make you feel left out of conversations. You may find that you need to get used to your hearing aid and learn some new skills such as lipreading. Remember that all this will take time.

Getting used to your hearing aid

If you need a hearing aid, it is a good idea to try one. You may even find that you get on better with two – one for each ear. It takes time to get used to using them because you have to become familiar with the sounds you hear, so the sooner you start the better. Remember you can get hearing aids free of charge on the NHS.

Hearing therapists and support services

You could ask at your local hospital if you can see someone who can give you further advice. Hearing therapists and support workers advise and support people who have a hearing loss. They give you many practical suggestions on coming to terms with your hearing loss, getting the most out of your hearing aids, and tips for communicating with other people.

Local support groups

Your audiology clinic or local library should be able to tell you about local support groups.

Lipreading classes

Many people who have lost their hearing get a great deal from joining a lipreading class. Ask your local library or education department for details or contact the RNID Information Line.

Equipment to help you

There is a range of equipment that you might find useful if you have a hearing loss, whether you use a hearing aid or not.

You could try a telephone amplifier to use with your existing telephone or get a new telephone specially designed for hard of hearing people. You can get equipment to let you know when your telephone, doorbell or alarm clock is ringing or to draw your attention to your smoke detector or baby alarm. Listening equipment can help you hear the television, radio, stereo or conversation. You can get the most out of your television, video or DVD player by finding out about subtitles and using them.

Further information

The RNID Information Line can give you information about hearing aids and equipment. See the back of this leaflet for contact details.

**The RNID
Information Line can
give you further
information about
hearing aids**



Also have a look at our leaflets and factsheets:

- *All about hearing aids.*
- *Buying a hearing aid?*
- *Digital hearing aids.*
- *Equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.*
- *Lipreading and lipspeaking.*
- *Living with someone who has a gradual hearing loss.*
- *Subtitles on television, DVDs and video tapes.*
- *The NHS hearing aid service.*

You can also visit the RNID Shop at www.rnidshop.com to buy equipment online. Alternatively, send off for a copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue. See the back of this leaflet for contact details.

RNID's vision is of a world where deafness and hearing loss are not barriers to opportunity and fulfilment.

RNID is the largest charity representing the 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. As a membership charity, we aim to achieve a radically better quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing people. We do this by campaigning and lobbying vigorously, by raising awareness of deafness and hearing loss, by providing services and through social, medical and technical research.

This leaflet is part of RNID's communication range.

Published in October 2003.

Some photographs in this leaflet were posed by models.

RNID Information Line

Contact us for a range of information on deafness and hearing loss.
RNID Information Line, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Telephone 0808 808 0123 Textphone 0808 808 9000
Fax 020 7296 8199 informationline@rnid.org.uk www.rnid.org.uk

RNID Tinnitus Helpline

Contact us for information and advice about tinnitus.
RNID Tinnitus Helpline, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Telephone 0808 808 6666 Textphone 0808 808 0007
Fax 020 7296 8199 tinnitushelpline@rnid.org.uk www.rnid.org.uk

RNID Sound Advantage

We sell a range of equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.
RNID Sound Advantage, 1 Haddonbrook Business Centre,
Orton Southgate, Peterborough PE2 6YX
Telephone 01733 232607 Textphone 01733 238020
Fax 01733 361161 solutions@rnid.org.uk www.rnidshop.com

1167/inf154.1003 Registered Charity No. 207720
Photography Crispin Hughes, Alex Segre, Jens Storch



RNID ● 
for deaf and hard of hearing people

Want to know more?

This leaflet is available in audio tape, braille and large print.

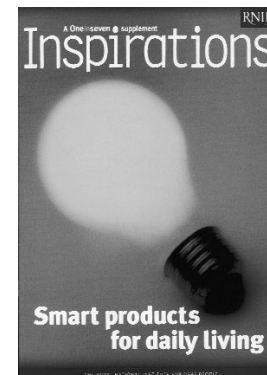
We can also send you more information on many of the subjects covered in this leaflet. Just tick the boxes below, tell us what you particularly need to know about, or see our website at www.rnid.org.uk

Please send me:

Losing your hearing as you get older

- Audio tape Braille Large print
- The RNID Publications Catalogue.
- Information about RNID Typetalk and BT TextDirect.
- Details of RNID communication services in my area.
- A copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue, giving details of equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- RNID's fundraising leaflet. We rely on donations from individuals, companies, trusts and fundraising events. Our leaflet shows how *you* can help.
- Details on supporting our future work with a legacy.
- Information on how to take part in RNID campaigns.
- Other information – please tell us what you would like to know.

Please fill in your name and address overleaf.



Become a member

The information and advice that you have received in this leaflet does not stop here. Joining the other 32,000 RNID members is an excellent way of receiving up-to-date information on deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus as well as our influential campaigns. All members benefit from:

- **One in Seven**, our lively, colour, bi-monthly magazine.
- **10% off** RNID priced publications.
- **A £5 voucher** towards equipment from RNID Sound Advantage.
- Access to **RNID Select** – special offers on a range of well-known brands.
- Being part of the **campaign** to improve the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people.

How to join

Membership is open to all and costs as little as £12.50 a year. To join:

- **Visit www.rnid.org.uk/join** or
- **Call 020 7296 8049 (tel/textphone)** or
- **Complete the coupon overleaf.**

You can save £2 off the standard price of membership by paying by Direct Debit. Contact the Membership Helpline on tel/textphone 020 7296 8049 for information.

Join today!

Yes, I want to stay informed

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) _____ First name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ E-mail _____

Telephone _____ Textphone _____

Please accept my payment: (tick relevant boxes)

- £19.50 Standard rate
- £12.50 If you are retired, unwaged or a full-time student
- I would like to make a donation of £ _____
- I enclose a cheque/PO made payable to RNID
(delete as appropriate)
- I prefer to pay by
MasterCard/Visa/CharityCard/Switch/Delta
(delete as appropriate)

Card number

Switch issue no

Signature _____ Expiry date ____/____

- Please treat all my membership payments and/or donations from 6 April 2000 until further notice as Gift Aid. (This will increase the value of your membership fee to RNID by almost a third, with no extra cost to you.)

NB To qualify for Gift Aid, I understand that I must have paid an amount of Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax equal to the tax RNID reclaims on my donations and/or membership payments.

Please return this form to RNID, FREEPOST LON13186, London EC1B 1AL

Occasionally RNID will send you information on our work, please tick this box if you would prefer not to receive this.

Occasionally we will allow other organisations to contact you, please tick this box if you would prefer not to be contacted.

Please fill in your details

(Please write clearly, using block capitals)

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) _____ First name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ E-mail _____

Telephone _____ Textphone _____

Your contact details will be held on our database so that occasionally we can send you information on our work. Please tick this box if you do not wish your details to be kept on our database. We will use any information you give below to help us tailor our services to your needs. You do not have to give this information, but if you do, please tick this box to confirm we may keep it on our database.

Tick all boxes that apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| Is the information: | How would you describe yourself? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For you | <input type="checkbox"/> Profoundly/severely deaf |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For a friend or family member | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard of hearing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A professional enquiry | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing |
| Are you? | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing aid user |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At school | <input type="checkbox"/> I have tinnitus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A student | <input type="checkbox"/> I have balance problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working age | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retired | |

If we could provide it, would you like to receive information in a different format? Please use number 1, 2 or 3 to show your preferred choice:

- Videotape in British Sign Language (BSL) with subtitles
- E-mail/website
- Face-to-face

If we could provide it, would you like information in another language?

- Yes, please tell us which one _____

**Please return to: RNID Information Line,
19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
or order from our website at www.rnid.org.uk**