

Equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people



About this leaflet

This leaflet looks at the equipment you might find useful if you are deaf or hard of hearing. It also tells you about equipment to help you manage tinnitus.

We give you brief information about the sort of equipment you can use in the home, car, workplace and when out socialising. You will also find information about help with paying for equipment and where to buy equipment.

We use the term deaf people to refer to deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people throughout this leaflet.

You can contact the RNID Information Line for further information about any of the subjects covered in this leaflet. You will find their details on the back cover of this leaflet.

**Contact
the RNID
Information Line
for further
information**



Equipment to suit your hearing loss

Quite often you will need different sorts of equipment depending on your level of deafness or hearing loss. Throughout this leaflet, we refer to different levels of deafness.

- People with mild deafness have some difficulty following speech, mainly in noisy situations. The quietest sounds they can hear fall between 21 and 39 dBHL.
- People with moderate deafness have difficulty following speech without a hearing aid. The quietest sounds they can hear fall between 40 and 69 dBHL.
- People with severe deafness rely a lot on lipreading, even with a hearing aid. The quietest sounds they can hear fall between 70 and 94 dBHL. British Sign Language (BSL) may be their first or preferred language.
- People who are profoundly deaf may communicate by using BSL or by lipreading and BSL. BSL may be their first or preferred language. The quietest sounds they can hear in their better ear average 95 dBHL or more.

Equipment to alert you to different sounds

Household equipment is often designed to make a sound to get your attention. If you have difficulty hearing, for example, an alarm clock, telephone ringing, doorbell, baby crying or smoke alarm, you can get equipment that has been designed for deaf people. This equipment uses flashing lights, or vibrating pagers or pads, to get your attention.

You can buy these pieces of equipment separately or you can use a multi-alerting system that draws your attention to a whole range of different sounds or events within your home.

See our factsheet, *Multi-alerting systems to let you know about different sounds in your home*.

Alarm clocks

If you cannot hear your alarm clock, you could try using one with a vibrating pad that goes under your pillow or mattress, or one with a flashing light. If you share your alarm clock with a hearing person, you may want to buy one that also has an alarm they can hear. You can also get a range of wristwatch alarms that can be set to vibrate. See our factsheet on *Alarm clocks* for more information.

You could try using an alarm clock with a vibrating pad



Baby monitors

Baby monitors for deaf people use a vibrating pad and/or flashing light to draw your attention to your crying baby. You can also get baby monitors that let you see your baby on your television, although the picture may not be bright enough to wake you at night. Our factsheet on *Baby monitors* tells you more.

Doorbells

If you have a slight hearing loss, a louder doorbell may be all you need to help you hear your doorbell. However, if you need more help, you may be able to add extra bells to your existing doorbell system and put them in different rooms. You can also get systems that use a table lamp, flashing strobe light or pager to let you know the doorbell is ringing. Alternatively, you could try a system that makes all the lights in your house flash or dim whenever the doorbell rings.

Some systems use radio transmitters that send signals when the doorbell rings. A receiver flashes, makes a noise or vibrates if the doorbell rings.

If you have a door entry system or intercom buzzer, you can get equipment that automatically flashes or dims the house lights when someone is at the door. Our factsheet on *Doorbells* tells you more.

Smoke alarms

Ordinary smoke alarms make a fairly loud noise. If you have a moderate hearing loss, you may still be able to hear them, but be careful – they may not wake you while you are asleep.

You can also get smoke alarms that are designed for deaf people to use in the home. They use vibrations or flashing strobe lights to let you know when they have detected smoke.

For more information on domestic smoke alarms, see our factsheet on *Smoke alarm systems*. Contact RNID Sound Advantage (see back cover for contact details) for information about installing a smoke alarm system in the workplace.

**You can get
smoke alarms that
are designed for
deaf people**



Telecommunications

Telephones

If you have difficulty hearing the phone ring, or someone speaking to you on the phone, you may want to try adjusting or adapting the phone you already have, rather than buying a new one.

If you find it difficult to hear the phone ringing, check to see if you can turn up the volume of the ringer or change its pitch. Try placing your phone on a hard surface, as this will make the ring louder. If you still cannot hear your phone, you could add an extension bell, or a flashing light, in one or more rooms.

A telephone amplifier may also help you to hear what a caller is saying to you. It is either attached to the earpiece of your handset, or fits between the base and handset on a modern corded phone. It works only on phones with the dialling pad on the base unit. You can also buy phones with increased amplification and flashing lights, as in-built features.

Some phones also have an inductive coupler in the handset. This means you can use the phone with a hearing aid that has a 'T' setting and this should help you hear sound more clearly with reduced background noise.

If you use a hearing aid we would advise you to get an analogue phone – unfortunately, cordless digital phones can cause severe interference with hearing aids. Some phones may work better for you than others – so if you can, try them out.

For more information, see our factsheet on *Telephones and fax machines*.

Textphones

If you are severely or profoundly deaf, you may want to get a textphone. The brand name 'Minicom' is often used to describe any textphone. Textphones have a small display screen, and a keyboard, so you can type what you want to say and read what is being typed in reply. Some also have a voice telephone handset and others are designed to be used with a separate voice telephone.

Mobile phones

Mobile phones come equipped with a range of ring tones to choose from and have an adjustable ringer volume. Many models also vibrate when they ring.

You can use a mobile phone to send SMS text messages. This can be a good way to keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. It can also be useful in emergencies, although you should remember that SMS messages are not always delivered.

**SMS text
messaging is a
good way to
keep in touch**



All mobile phones in the UK are now digital. Unfortunately, these can cause severe interference

with some hearing aids. We strongly advise you to try out any mobile phone that you are thinking of buying with your present hearing aid.

If you have or buy a digital mobile telephone that does interfere with your present hearing aid, you can get add-on listening accessories, such as neckloops and ear hooks, that may let you use your mobile effectively. See our factsheet on *Mobile phones* for more information.

Mobile textphones

The Nokia 9210 is currently the only product that can be used as a mobile textphone. This means you can use it to have textphone conversations while out.

Home based SMS systems

You can get a number of products that allow you to send and receive SMS text messages from your home, without having to buy a mobile, such as some digital cordless phones.

RNID Typetalk and BT TextDirect

If you have a textphone, you can call someone else with a textphone directly. If you have a voice telephone and want to talk to someone who has a textphone, or vice versa, you can use RNID Typetalk, the national telephone relay service.

BT TextDirect enables callers using textphones and voice telephones to dial each other directly. An RNID Typetalk operator is automatically brought in to relay text-to-voice and voice-to-text calls when you are ready to start your conversation. BT TextDirect can also bring substantial savings on the textphone part of your bill.

See our factsheet on *Textphones* for more information. Go to www.typetalk.org for a range of information about RNID Typetalk.

Videophones

Videophones let you see, and talk or sign, to someone at the same time. The picture quality is good enough for sign language communication, however, you may need to sign a little more slowly than usual. It is difficult to lipread using a videophone because the picture quality is not good enough and you may experience a time delay between the sound and picture.

To find out more, see our factsheet on *Videophones*.

Fax machines

You can use a fax machine to send and receive handwritten notes, printed text or pictures along the telephone network. See our factsheet on *Telephones and fax machines* for more information.

Listening equipment

You can get a range of equipment to help you hear conversations, for example in the home, in a pub, in cafés or at meetings. You can also get equipment to help you hear your television, stereo or radio (see later, *Loop and infrared systems*).

If you are moderately deaf you may want to try a **conversation aid**, particularly if you don't wear a hearing aid. It is small, easy to use and ideal in places where you are talking to one other person in a quiet environment.

Most conversation aids have a microphone to pick up

speech, an amplifier to make the speech louder, and accessories to reproduce the speech, for example steto-clips, earphones, neckloops, earloops, or headphones. Some also have an in-built telecoil for listening via loop systems (see later, *Loop and infrared systems*).



You can use a neckloop to help you hear sound more clearly

More advanced **radio microphone systems** can also be used to listen at a distance in conferences, meetings or in more difficult listening situations.

You can get different equipment depending on your level of deafness and whether you wear a hearing aid. Our leaflet, *Sound and subtitles – making the most of audiovisual equipment*, tells you more.

Loop and infrared systems

You may want to fit a loop or infrared system in your home. You will also find them fitted in many public places, such as theatres, cinemas, banks, shopping centres and train stations.

A **loop system** helps someone who uses a hearing aid or loop listener to hear sounds more clearly by reducing or cutting out background noise. At home, for example, a loop system may be used to pick up sound from your television, hi-fi or radio. A loop system can also be set up with a microphone to help hearing aid users hear conversations in noisy places.

Infrared systems are an alternative to loop systems. They have two parts – a transmitter and a receiver. For further information, see our factsheet, *Induction loop and infrared systems – a guide for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

Subtitles

You may find it helpful to use subtitles when watching television, DVDs and pre-recorded video tapes. To find out more, see our factsheet, *Subtitles on television, DVDs and video tapes*.

Equipment for car drivers and passengers

Some equipment is available to help deaf car drivers and passengers get more out of a car journey. This includes loop systems, intercoms and car radios with a display screen. Have a look at our factsheet, *Cars and public transport*, for more information.

Equipment to help you manage tinnitus

If you have tinnitus, your audiologist may recommend that you use a sound generator as part of a tinnitus management programme. These produce a soothing 'shhh' sound, known as 'white noise'. They may look like hearing aids – only professionals can provide these. Or you can buy bedside sound generators that play sounds such as waves, fountains, birds or rain. Alternatively, you can plug a sound pillow, or under-the-pillow speakers into a radio or hi-fi system. Contact the RNID Tinnitus Helpline for more information (details on back cover).



Bedside sound generators can play a range of soothing sounds

Buying equipment

- Visit our website www.rnid.org.uk for up-to-date information about some of the products covered in this leaflet. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can contact RNID's Information Line (details on the back cover) for the same information.
- Send off for a copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue, which features a range of products to improve the everyday lives of deaf people (contact details on the back cover).

Paying for equipment

You may be able to get help to pay for equipment. Contact the RNID Information Line for more information about the following:

- Social services may help to pay for, or provide, equipment. For more information, contact your social worker with deaf people or your local social services department.
- The Government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work or for job interviews, whether you are employed or unemployed.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) may require service providers, such as hospitals or GP surgeries to provide equipment.
- If you are a student, you may be able to get help to pay for equipment or your education provider may have to provide it under the DDA.

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 equipment range.

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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 0870 789 8855 Textphone 01733 238020
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