

Listening equipment to help you in everyday situations

About this factsheet

This factsheet is part of RNID's **special equipment** range. It is written for deaf and hard of hearing people. We use the term deaf people to refer to deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people throughout this factsheet.

Read this factsheet to find out about:

- What is listening equipment?
- Accessories for listening equipment.
- Cordless and infrared listening equipment.
- Using listening equipment in different situations.

Throughout this factsheet we use the term listening equipment.

Manufacturers may use some other names for listening equipment such as:

- Personal listeners.
- Personal listening aids.
- Conversation aids.
- Assistive listening devices.

At the end of this factsheet we give you details of organisations you can contact for further information.

If you would like this factsheet on audio tape, in braille or in large print, fill in the *Want to know more?* form at the end of this factsheet and send it to RNID.

Important safety information

Listening equipment can be very loud. Turning the sound up too high, especially over a long period of time, may make your hearing loss worse. You should use listening equipment very carefully.

You do not need a prescription to buy listening equipment but if you have any concerns about your hearing you should seek medical advice from a qualified medical practitioner.

Different levels of hearing loss

When we refer to different levels of hearing loss in the factsheet, this is what we mean:

Mild: You have some difficulty following speech mainly in noisy situations.

Moderate: You have difficulty following speech without a hearing aid.

Severe: You may rely on lipreading, even with a hearing aid. British Sign Language (BSL) may be your first or preferred language.

Profound: You may rely on lipreading and may use BSL.

What does listening equipment do?

Listening equipment makes sound louder or 'amplifies' it. It is usually available with accessories including headphones, stetoclip headsets, a neckloop or an earloop, making it useful in a range of situations at home or at work. Listening equipment can help you hear:

- Conversations at home or in your car.
- On your phone or mobile phone.

- At meetings and lectures.
- Your TV or the stereo.

You can use listening equipment, whether you wear a hearing aid or not. The type of listening equipment and the accessory you choose will depend on the level of your hearing loss. We tell you more about this later on in this factsheet.

What does listening equipment look like?

A basic model has a box containing an amplifier, a built-in microphone to pick up sound, and a dial or push button volume control to make sound louder or quieter. More advanced models have some additional features such as:

- Automatic Gain Control. This feature automatically reduces the amplification on very loud sounds.
- A tone control. This lets you change treble tones that can help make speech clearer. Some may also have a switch that can reduce low frequency (bass tone) background sounds.
- A socket to plug in an extension microphone – this enables you to listen to conversation, the TV, radio or stereo system from across the other side of the room. See later, *What can I use to hear conversations, the TV or stereo equipment.*
- A socket to plug in accessories such as headphones. For more information see later, *Accessories for listening equipment.*
- A connection lead that plugs directly into your TV (scart socket) or stereo system. This usually gives better sound quality than an extension microphone.
- A 'T' switch to listen to a loop system (see later, *Can I use a listening equipment to listen to a loop system?*).

Accessories for listening equipment

What you choose will depend on the level of your hearing loss and whether you wear a hearing aid. In this section we look at:

- Over-the-ear and in-the-ear headphones, and stetoclip headsets.
- Neckloops and earloops (only for people with hearing aids).
- 'Silent' headphones – headphones with a magnetic (inductive) signal (only for people with hearing aids).
- Noise cancelling headphones.
- Standard headphones.

Over-the-ear and in-the-ear headphones, and stetoclip headsets

Most listening equipment comes with over-the-ear, in-the-ear (button style) headphones or stetoclip headsets.

In-the-ear headphones stop sound from leaking out too much, which means that other people around you cannot hear what you are listening to. They may be louder than over-the-ear headphones because they fit into the ear.

Over-the-ear and in-the-ear headphones are suitable for people with normal hearing but you may also find them useful if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

Stetoclip headsets are similar to headphones but tend to produce a louder sound, so you may find them useful if you have a moderate hearing loss. The frequency range of stetoclip headsets is not usually as wide as over-the-ear or in-the-ear headphones so their sound quality is not as good. You should take extra care when you use them because they are very loud.

How much do headphones and stetoclip headsets cost?

This kind of equipment costs £5 or more.

Neckloops

If you wear a hearing aid, a neckloop may suit you better than headphones. A neckloop consists of a loop of wire that goes round your neck. It plugs into the headphone socket on most listening equipment.

You need to switch your hearing aid to the 'T' position to pick up sound via the loop.

You can plug in a neckloop into the headphone socket on your personal stereo, stereo system or your TV – by using an extension lead you can pick up sound.

The signal from a neckloop is always in mono sound – you cannot get stereo sound. Mono means that you hear the same sound in both your left and right sides when you listen through headphones or loudspeakers. Stereo means that the left and right sides carry different but related sounds.

How much do neckloops cost?

Neckloops cost £10-£20.

Earloops

An earloop works in a similar way to a neckloop but it hooks over your ear next to your hearing aid. To pick up the sound signal from the earloop, switch your hearing aid to the 'T' position. You can use an earloop on either your left or right ear, depending on which side you use your hearing aid.

You can also get a 'dual version' earloop, which has an earhook for both ears. You can use these to listen to your personal stereo if you use hearing aids in both ears.

How much do earloops cost?

Earloops cost £15-£25.

'Silent' headphones – headphones with a magnetic signal

If you prefer not to use neckloops or earloops, you may find a pair of 'silent' headphones useful. Although they look like headphones, they produce a magnetic signal like a neckloop or earloop so you'll need to switch your hearing aid to 'T' to listen to them.

You can get different versions of 'silent' headphones. Some have sound on one side and a magnetic signal on the other while others have a magnetic output on both sides for stereo listening.

Silent headphones can be used with most personal stereos and you can also use them with your TV and stereo equipment if you have an extension lead.

How much do silent headphones cost?

Silent headphones cost £15-£25.

Noise cancelling headphones

These will suit you if you have mild to moderate hearing loss and you do not wear a hearing aid. Noise cancelling headphones reduce background noise, helping you to focus on the sound you are trying to listen to. They can be useful in very noisy environments, such as on an aeroplane.

How much do noise cancelling headphones cost?

Noise cancelling headphones cost from £50 upwards.

Standard headphones

Some standard headphones naturally produce a magnetic signal that your hearing aid may be able to pick up when it is switched to 'T'. You may find that you need to turn up the volume control on your equipment and/or your hearing aid to get a loud enough sound. People around you may be able to hear the sounds coming out from the headphones and you may annoy them if you turn the volume up very high.

How much do standard headphones cost?

These kind of headphones cost £15 or more.

Cordless listening equipment

You may find cordless listening equipment useful if you do not like wearing equipment with wires, or you want to be able to move around a room easily. Cordless listening equipment includes:

- Cordless infrared headphones.
- Cordless FM headphones.
- Infrared listening equipment.

You can use cordless listening equipment in a range of situations, for example at home, during conversations, or watching your TV.

Cordless infrared headphones

You can get these from high street stores but they are not specifically designed for deaf people. However, they can be useful if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

Cordless infrared headphones have two parts – an infrared transmitter and cordless infrared headphones.

The infrared transmitter plugs into the scart or phono socket on your TV or stereo system and you wear the cordless headphones.

Most cordless infrared headphones have a volume control and are powered with rechargeable batteries. This can make the headphones quite bulky and heavy to wear.

You have to use the headphones in the same room as the transmitter because infrared signals cannot go through walls.

How much do cordless infrared headphones cost?

Cordless infrared headphones cost from £25.

Cordless FM headphones

You can also get cordless FM (Frequency Modulation) headphones from high street stores but they are not designed specifically for deaf people. However, like cordless infrared headphones, they can be useful if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

Cordless FM headphones look and work like infrared cordless headphones, but instead of using infrared signals between the transmitter and headphone they use radio signals. The main advantage of cordless FM headphones is that they can pick up the signal from the transmitter anywhere in the home – and depending on the range, even in the garden!

How much do cordless FM headphones cost?

Cordless FM headphones cost from £20.

Infrared listening equipment

There are two sorts of infrared listening equipment:

- For people with hearing aids.
- For people who do not use hearing aids.

For people with hearing aids

Infrared listening equipment for people with hearing aids has a neckloop receiver that you use by switching your hearing to 'T'. The neckloop is part of the receiver.

You can also plug an extension microphone into the infrared transmitter. When you are listening to your TV, radio or stereo system, you can put the microphone near the loudspeaker with the transmitter close by. For the best possible sound quality, you can plug the infrared transmitter directly into the scart or phono socket on your TV or stereo system.

For people who do not use a hearing aid

You can use some infrared equipment if you do not wear hearing aids. These have a stetoclip headset receiver. The receiver needs to be in the same room as the transmitter because infrared signals cannot go through walls.

How much does infrared listening equipment cost?

Infrared listening equipment cost from £60–£300.

What can I use to hear conversations, the TV or stereo equipment?

If you have mild to moderate hearing loss, you can use listening equipment with a built-in microphone. This usually helps you hear

conversation when talking to someone who is less than two metres away from you.

You cannot plug an extension microphone into this type of model, or use it with a direct connection lead for your TV or stereo equipment.

How much do these cost?

They cost £20-£70.

Listening equipment with an extension microphone

If you want to listen to a conversation from across a room or listen to your TV or stereo system, you can use listening equipment that has a socket for an extension microphone. A microphone with a long lead is normally supplied with this kind of equipment. If you want to listen to your TV or stereo system, plug the microphone into your listening equipment and put the microphone as close as you can to your TV or stereo loudspeaker.

Some types of listening equipment can be plugged into the scart or phono socket on your TV or stereo system using a direct connection lead rather than an extension microphone. This gives the best possible sound quality.

One other option is to listen to your TV or stereo system using headphones, which can help if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss. Listening equipment that can be used with an external microphone and/or scart socket may also have a built-in microphone.

How much does listening equipment with a microphone cost?

This kind of equipment costs £35-£75.

Can I use listening equipment to listen to a loop system?

You may have seen loop systems in meeting rooms, cinemas, theatres, and banks. A loop system cuts down background noise and you can listen to the sound it picks up more clearly.

If you wear a hearing aid you can listen to sound through a loop system by switching your hearing aid to 'T'. If you don't wear a hearing aid, you can still listen to sound through a loop system, as long as the listening equipment you are using has a 'loop listening' option.

Some listening equipment can only be used to listen to loop systems. This kind of listening equipment does not have a microphone and is called a 'loop listener'.

For more information, see our factsheet, *Induction loops and infrared systems – a guide for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

Equipment for telephone or mobile phone conversations

You can get a range of equipment to make it easier for you to hear incoming calls on your phone or mobile phone. For more information, see our factsheets, *Telephones – information for deaf and hard of hearing people* and *Mobile phones – information for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

Listening equipment for use in education and work settings

You can get a range of equipment to use during lectures, meetings and interviews. In this section we look at:

- Conference folders.
- Digital recorders.

- Portable induction loop systems.
- Radio aid systems.

Conference folder

You can use a conference folder in meetings and small groups to help you hear what people are saying. It is battery operated and has a built-in induction loop and two microphones. You can plug in an extension microphone and neckloop or headphones. You can also plug a tape recorder or a digital recorder into a conference folder.

How much does a conference folder cost?

A conference folder costs about £330.

Digital recorder

A digital recorder can record memos, messages and dictation. It has a built-in microphone and is battery powered. Most digital recorders are supplied with headphones but if you prefer, you may be able to plug in a neckloop or earloop instead.

How much does a digital recorder cost?

A digital recorder costs from £20.

Portable induction loop systems

You should be able to use a hearing aid switched to 'T', a loop listener, or any listening equipment that has a loop listening option with a portable loop system. If you have a mild to moderate hearing loss, you can use headphones with listening equipment that has a loop listening option. For more information, see our factsheet, *Induction loops and infrared systems – a guide for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

Radio microphone systems

These systems are designed for use in classrooms or similar settings but can also be used in other situations. Radio microphone systems work with hearing aids. Some also work with cochlear implants. They can help students hear the teacher, lecturer, or other students. The radio receiver can also be used with headphones or a neckloop.

Generally, these systems need to be professionally installed. However, the 'Conversor radio microphone system' can be used in the classroom or the home. It has a hand held wireless microphone and body-worn neck loop receiver. The Conversor is portable and you do not have to have it professionally installed.

How much does a radio aid system cost?

A radio aid system costs £250-£1000.

For more information about equipment used in educational settings, see our factsheet, *Equipment to help deaf and hard of hearing learners*.

Equipment to help you hear conversations or the radio in the car

Fitting loop systems in vehicles

If you wear a hearing aid, you may find it difficult to hear conversations or the radio when you are travelling in a vehicle because of traffic and road noise, and the noise of the engine itself.

You might want to have a loop system installed in your vehicle to enable you to listen to your car radio as well as conversations in the car. However, the car ignition system and electrical wiring may cause interference that can be picked up by a hearing aid switched to 'T'.

Before a loop system is installed in your vehicle, check for any interference by switching your hearing aid to 'T' while the engine is running. Reducing interference can be difficult, but your local garage may be able to help you.

How much would it cost to fit a loop system in my vehicle?

A car loop system costs £100-£150. You will also need to pay for someone to install it for you.

Intercom

An intercom can help you and your passengers to chat while in the car. A simple system includes a personal listener and a microphone. You listen to sound using headphones or earphones, or you may wish to use a neck- or earloop.

You should check the level of interference in your vehicle by switching your hearing aid to 'T' before you buy any equipment.

It is not safe to try and set up the intercom system while driving.

How much would it cost to have an intercom system in my vehicle?

You should expect to pay £50 or more plus installation costs.

For more information, see our factsheet, *Cars and public transport – information for deaf and hard of hearing people*

Do you have difficulty using small, awkward or heavy equipment?

Nowadays a lot of equipment has tiny and often quite fiddly buttons and other controls. Sometimes equipment will just be an awkward shape or

maybe it's too heavy for you to use. If you have these sort of difficulties it is particularly important to try out equipment first before you buy.

Check:

- Are the buttons easy for you to press?
- Can you use the other controls easily?
- Is the labelling on the controls easy to read?
- Can you hold the equipment comfortably?
- Is the equipment too heavy?

Buying equipment

You can get up-to-date information about some of the products covered in this factsheet by visiting our website www.rnid.org.uk/equipment and looking at our database of equipment. You will find details of products, manufacturers, suppliers and costs. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can contact RNID's Information Line (details below) for the same information.

Buying equipment from RNID

RNID Sound Advantage sells a range of equipment for deaf people. Visit the RNID Shop at www.rnidshop.com to buy some of the equipment online. Alternatively, send off for a copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue.

RNID Sound Advantage, 1 Haddonbrook Business Centre,
Orton Southgate, Peterborough PE2 6YX.

Tel: 0870 789 8855. Textphone: 01733 238020. Fax: 0870 789 8822.

E-mail: solutions@rnid.org.uk Website: www.rnidshop.com

Help with 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:

- The Government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work, or, if you are unemployed for interviews. See our factsheet *Information for deaf and hard of hearing people in work or looking for work*.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) may require service providers, such as hospitals and GP surgeries, to provide equipment. See our factsheet *The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) – a guide for deaf and hard of hearing customers*.
- 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. Have a look at our factsheet *Social services for deaf and hard of hearing people*.
- 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. See our factsheets:
 - *Deaf and hard of hearing students in Further Education – your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)*.
 - *Deaf and hard of hearing students in Higher Education – your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)*.
 - *Benefits and allowances – information for deaf and hard of hearing students aged 19 and over*.

Further information from RNID

Would you like to keep up-to-date with new and updated factsheets?

Visit www.rnid.org.uk/html/factsheets/factsheets.htm where you can join our free mailing list and view latest news.

We publish a range of special equipment factsheets which has more detailed information about some of the equipment we mention in this

factsheet. You may also wish to get RNID's leaflet, *Equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

The RNID Information Line offers a wide range of information on many aspects of deafness and hearing loss. You can contact us for further copies of this factsheet and the full range of our information factsheets and leaflets.

RNID Information Line

RNID Information Line, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL.
Tel: 0808 808 0123. Textphone: 0808 808 9000. Fax: 020 7296 8199.
E-mail: informationline@rnid.org.uk Website: www.rnid.org.uk

Alternatively, fill in the *Want to know more?* order form at the end of this factsheet and return it to RNID.

Copyright

This factsheet may be photocopied for information or educational purposes only. It may not be photocopied in part. It may *not* be photocopied or reproduced if your intention is to sell the factsheets. Factsheets are updated regularly. Any out-of-date editions should be destroyed. You can get the most recent edition from RNID. If you wish to photocopy this factsheet, please contact the RNID Information Line (see above for details) or go to our website at www.rnid.org.uk to check that you have the most recent edition. If you are a commercial organisation and you need multiple copies of this factsheet, please contact the RNID Information Line to find out how to get the quantity you need.

RNID Information, January 2004

Want to know more?

This factsheet is available in **audio tape**, **braille** and **large print**. We can also send you more information on many of the subjects covered in this factsheet. 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:

Listening equipment to help you in everyday situations audio tape braille large print

The RNID *Publications Catalogue*.

Information about RNID Typetalk and BT TextDirect.

Details of RNID communication services in my area.

RNID's fundraising leaflet. RNID relies heavily on donations from, individuals, companies, trusts and fundraising events. Our leaflet shows how *you* can help.

Details on supporting RNID's future work with a legacy.

Information on how to take part in RNID campaigns.

A copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue, giving details of equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Other information – please tell us what you would like to know.

We are always keen to know what our customers think about our publications. If you have any suggestions for ways we could improve this factsheet you can use the space below. Please send your suggestions to the address overleaf.

Please send this information to: (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 the database.

We will use any information you give below to monitor requests for this factsheet and 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:

- For you
- For a friend or family member
- A professional enquiry

Are you?

- At school or below school age
- A student
- Working age
- Retired

How would you describe yourself?

- Profoundly/severely deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Hearing
- Hearing aid user
- I have tinnitus
- I have balance problems

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) and with subtitles
- E-mail
- Face-to-face

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

- Yes. Please tell us which one.

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