

Benefits and services for deaf and hard of hearing people



About this leaflet

This leaflet is written for deaf people who would like to find out about benefits and services. We use the term deaf people to refer to deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people throughout this leaflet.

In this leaflet, you can find out about:

- Support for deaf people.
- Communication services.
- Hearing aids.
- Equipment to help you.
- Help with getting equipment and services.
- Rights and benefits which can help you.

Support for deaf people

If you are deaf, you can get a lot of support from your local authority (your local council), your local Jobcentre Plus, the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions, and other organisations, such as RNID.

Equipment, communication services, telephone services, and benefits and allowances are all available. You may have to pay for some things, depending on when or where you use them, but you may get other things free or on free loan.

Communication services

Many different communication services are available to help deaf people. If you find it difficult to follow discussions in groups, perhaps at conferences, meetings, or on a one-to-one basis, you may find it useful to use a communication service. You can choose from the following, depending on what you prefer and your particular needs:

- **A BSL/English interpreter**, who interprets from one language to the other. In the UK, this will usually be British Sign Language (BSL) to spoken or written English, or spoken or written English to BSL.
- **A lipspeaker**, who repeats what a hearing person or speaker is saying without using their voice so that you can lipread them.
- **A speech-to-text reporter** (also known as a palantypist or stenographer), who types every word that is spoken using a special keyboard. Everything that is said appears on a computer screen.
- **An electronic notetaker** types a summary of what has been said. This appears on a computer screen for you to read.
- **A notetaker**, who is trained to take accurate and clear notes for deaf people. A notetaker does this in handwritten English or by typing the notes on a laptop computer.
- **A communication support worker (CSW)**, who offers support to students in education in various ways such as taking notes, interpreting or clear communication.



**Communication services
can help you follow
group discussions**

You may be able to get help to pay for communication services. Contact the RNID Information Line for more details.

Hearing aids

In the UK, you can get free hearing aids on the NHS. You will first need to visit your GP (family doctor), who will refer you to a hospital where your hearing can be tested. If your hearing tests show that a hearing aid would help you, you will be given NHS hearing aids on free loan. Batteries, earmoulds, repairs, new tubing and adjustments are also free. If you need more powerful aids later, or if your aid breaks down, it will be repaired or replaced. However, if you lose or damage your aid through carelessness, you may be asked to pay towards the cost of a replacement.

Hearing aids are described as analogue or digital, depending on the technology they use to process sound. Digital hearing aids use technology that can process sounds better than analogue hearing aids to suit your hearing loss.

If tests show that a hearing aid would help you, you will be given NHS hearing aids on free loan



Until recently, you couldn't get digital hearing aids on the NHS. However, NHS hearing aid services are being modernised across the UK and digital hearing aids are now available in more and more areas. All services in

England should be providing them by April 2005. In Wales and Northern Ireland, all audiology services are now delivering a modern service, including digital hearing aids. In Scotland, the upgrade of the facilities and service is slower. We hope that eventually funding will be made available to provide digital hearing aids on the NHS throughout the UK.

The NHS may also be able to give you other help, such as hearing therapy (advice on living with deafness), or information about managing tinnitus – noises that some people hear ‘in the ears’ or ‘in the head’ – buzzing, ringing, whistling, hissing and other sounds.

The RNID Information Line can give you more information about hearing aids.

Equipment to help you

Many different types of equipment are available for deaf people. This equipment can help you wherever you are – at work, while studying, or in your leisure time.

- If you can't hear sounds in your home such as your doorbell, telephone, smoke alarm, or a baby crying, then you could use an alerting system, paging system or a baby monitor. These will either vibrate or have a flashing light to alert you to the sound.
- If you find it difficult to hear your alarm clock, you may find a vibrating alarm clock helpful.
- If you find it difficult to hear what someone is saying on the phone and your hearing aid has a 'T' setting, you may find a telephone with a built-in inductive coupler helpful. If you don't have a hearing aid, you could use a telephone amplifier.

- If you can't use a voice telephone, you can use a textphone to type your conversation, a fax to send written or typed text, or a videophone so that you can see the person at the other end of the line and sign to each other.
- You can keep in touch by sending text messages from a mobile phone, or by using a mobile communicator. A mobile communicator is a combined mobile phone and personal organiser. You can use it to send e-mails, faxes or text messages.
- If you want to hear conversation, the television or music, or follow meetings or lectures more clearly, then personal listening equipment, induction loops and infrared systems can help.

For more information, see our leaflet, *Equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people*, and our range of special equipment factsheets at www.rnid.org.uk or contact the RNID Information Line.

If you can't use a voice telephone, a textphone lets you type your conversation



Help with getting equipment and services

Help at home

If you need equipment to use at home, you can often get this on free loan from the social services department of your local authority or from an agency working on its behalf. It is a good idea to register with your local authority if you are deaf.

If you apply for help, someone from your local authority, such as a social worker with deaf people or a technical officer, may visit you to assess your needs.

You may be given equipment such as a loop system to hear music or the television more clearly, a textphone, a vibrating alarm clock, an amplifier for your voice telephone or flashing lights so that you know when your doorbell or telephone is ringing. It may be possible to try equipment out.

Help with education

If you are already in education or want to apply to do a course, you may be able to get communication services and equipment. Most disabled students – including deaf students – can get Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) to pay for communication services or equipment while studying in Higher Education. To find out more, contact your Local Education Authority (LEA), Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) or Education and Library Board (Northern Ireland).

If you are studying in Further Education, you usually won't qualify for DSA. Instead, the college where you are studying should provide what you need. Different colleges provide different amounts of support. Contact your college Disability or Learning Support Officer for further details.

Further and Higher Education institutions in England, Wales and Scotland must provide equipment and communication services as part of their duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Unfortunately, this duty does not yet apply in Northern Ireland.

For more information, see our range of education factsheets at www.rnid.org.uk or contact the RNID Information Line.

Help with transport

If you register with your local authority, you may also qualify for a Disabled Person's Railcard. This gives you cheaper train travel. You may also find it easier to get other help such as a free travel pass for public transport.

You may be able to get a free travel pass for public transport



Help at work

If you are deaf and you are in work, or looking for work, the Government's Access to Work scheme can help with the cost of equipment, communication services and changes to your working environment to provide access for you at work.

Examples of equipment could include telephone amplifiers, textphones or loop systems. If you are already in work, your employer has to pay part of the cost of the equipment. If you apply within six weeks of starting a new job, your employer may not have to pay anything. Access to Work covers the full cost of any kind of communication service. This could include interpreters, lipspeakers, speech-to-text reporters or notetakers that you need at work.

The Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus can give you more details or contact your local Access to Work Business Centre. You can also contact the RNID Information Line for more information.

Know your rights

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (CSDP Act)

This Act says that your local authority must provide services to deaf people. Policies will differ, but your local authority must be able to give you a copy of its policy. The local authority should provide the help it says you need but it may also ask you to pay part or all of the cost.

National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 (NHSCCA)

This Act says that local authorities must find out if any disabled people, including deaf people, need any particular community care services. To do this, they must carry out a community care assessment. If you need any community care services, the local authority should produce a community care plan to show what services you need and how you will get these.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

The DDA aims to stop discrimination against disabled people, and give them access to goods, facilities and services. Under the DDA, employers and service providers cannot treat deaf staff, job applicants, students or customers less favourably than they would be treated if they were not deaf.

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA)

According to the Act, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) applies directly to UK law, including the way in which the courts deal with cases. The HRA allows people, including disabled people, to rely on the Convention when they take cases to court. The ECHR includes the right to life, to a fair trial, to freedom of expression and to privacy.

For information and advice about your rights under all of these Acts, contact the RNID Information Line.

Benefits and deaf people

You may be able to get some benefits because you are deaf. You may also qualify for other benefits that are not related to your deafness.

Benefits for disabled people and their carers

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Children or adults under 65 can claim DLA if they have a disability that affects their everyday life. It is paid whether you are working, unemployed or studying, and it doesn't matter if you have other income or savings. DLA is not taxable and will not reduce any other benefits you are getting – in fact, it may even increase your entitlement to other benefits.

DLA has two parts – a care component and a mobility component. If you have a hearing loss, you may qualify for the care component if you need help with communication on most days. In addition, you may qualify for the mobility component if you need guidance or supervision out of doors.

Attendance Allowance

This is similar to DLA care component and people who are 65 or over can claim it.

Carer's Allowance

If you look after someone who gets Attendance Allowance or the middle or top rate of DLA care component, you can claim Carer's Allowance. You must be a carer for more than 35 hours a week and you must not be in education for 21 hours or more a week. If you are entitled to Carer's Allowance you may get an increase in your other benefits.

If you are unable to work because of a disability

If you are deaf and not working (or working fewer than 16 hours a week) you will normally be accepted as *incapable of work*, and allowed to claim Incapacity Benefit or Income Support rather than Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). This is good as Incapacity Benefit and Income Support are often paid at a higher rate than JSA.

You may qualify for Incapacity Benefit if you have recently worked and paid National Insurance contributions, or if you claim as a young person aged under 20. If you do not qualify for Incapacity Benefit you may get Income Support instead.

If you have been made deaf by your work or service in the armed forces

If you have become deaf as a result of exposure to noise or an accident at work you may be able to claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

If you have been disabled by service in the armed forces, you may be able to claim a war pension, but there are very strict rules about deafness. Some civilians disabled during wartime are also covered.

If you work for at least 16 hours a week

If you have low earnings you may be able to claim Working Tax Credit to top-up your earnings. The amount you get will depend on your personal circumstances, but there are extra amounts for people who have a disability. Tax credits can be claimed from the Inland Revenue.

For more information, see our range of benefits factsheets at www.rnid.org.uk or contact the RNID Information Line. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau may also be able to give you more advice about benefits.

RNID Typetalk

RNID Typetalk is the national telephone relay service run by RNID and funded by BT. It lets deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, deafblind and speech-impaired people communicate with hearing people, using the telephone network. Calls between textphone users and voice telephone users are relayed by an operator.

RNID Typetalk is available all day, every day of the year. It is free to use – you only have to pay for the calls you make. If you are deaf, you will need a textphone to use it.

Text and voice users can 'dial direct' using the BT TextDirect system – you just have to use a special code in front of the full telephone number you are calling. BT also automatically gives you a discount for the text part of most calls made through BT TextDirect.

Contact RNID Typetalk Customer Support for more details. Telephone 0800 7311 888 Textphone 18001 0800 500 888 www.typetalk.org

For more information, see our factsheet, *Textphones*.

Further information

The RNID Information Line can give you information on many aspects of deafness and hearing loss. Here are just a few of the questions we are able to help with:

- How do I book a BSL/English interpreter?
- Where can I go to learn lipreading?
- I can't hear the phone ringing anymore, is there any equipment I can get to help?
- Can I get a digital hearing aid on the NHS?
- I want to buy a hearing aid privately, can you offer any advice?
- I've heard about Disability Living Allowance, what is it and how can I apply for it?
- Can you tell me more about hyperacusis?
- I'm having trouble finding work, where can I go for help?

You can also contact the RNID Tinnitus Helpline for information and advice about tinnitus. See the back cover of this leaflet for all contact details.

**RNID Typetalk is
available all day,
every day of the year**



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 benefits range.

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Some photographs in this leaflet were posed by models.

www.rnid.org.uk

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
Fax 0870 789 8822 solutions@rnid.org.uk www.rnidshop.com

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