

The facts: equipment



The facts

What you need to know about equipment
for deaf and hard of hearing people

RNID •)))

Changing the world for deaf
and hard of hearing people

We're RNID, the charity working to change the world for the UK's 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people.

www.rnid.org.uk

This leaflet is for you if you are deaf or hard of hearing – or know someone who is.

In this leaflet we tell you about:

- equipment to alert you to different sounds
- equipment to help you use the telephone better
- listening equipment
- getting subtitles on TV and DVDs
- equipment to help you with your tinnitus
- where to buy equipment
- help with buying equipment.

And if you need more help, our free telephone helplines can give you even more information about equipment (see back cover for contact details). We also tell you about our factsheets that you can order from our Information Line. See our full list on page 19.

Does my hearing loss affect what I can use?

Yes, you may need different sorts of equipment depending on your level of deafness or hearing loss.

- Mild deafness – you have some difficulty following speech, mainly in noisy situations.
- Moderate deafness – you have difficulty following speech without a hearing aid.
- Severe deafness – you rely a lot on lipreading, even with a hearing aid. British Sign Language (BSL) may be your first or preferred language.
- Profoundly deaf – you are likely to rely on lipreading. BSL may be your first or preferred language.

What kind of alerting equipment can I get?

Maybe you have difficulty hearing your alarm clock, telephone ringing, doorbell, baby crying or smoke alarm? You can get equipment that uses flashing lights, or vibrating pagers or pads, to get your attention to sounds around the home.

You can either 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.

See our factsheet, **Multi-alerting systems**.

Please note – no system that relies on a visual trigger alone, such as a flashing light, can be guaranteed to wake you from sleep. We would always recommend that you use vibration as well as – or instead of – a flashing light to wake you up.

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. Some models also have flashing lights. 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, **Alarm clocks**.

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.

See our factsheet, **Baby monitors**.

Doorbells

If you have a slight hearing loss, you may only need a louder doorbell or one with a different sound. However, if you need more help, you could 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 are wireless and use radio to send signals to a receiver that flashes, makes a noise or vibrates if the doorbell rings.

See our factsheet, **Doorbells**.

Smoke alarms

Ordinary smoke alarms make a piercing, high-pitched sound. 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 get smoke alarms that are designed for deaf people to use in the home, such as the RNID smoke alarm. They use vibrations and flashing strobe lights to let you know when they have detected smoke.

See our factsheet, **Smoke alarm systems**. Or contact us for information about installing a smoke alarm system in the workplace.



How can I use the phone better?

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 may make the ring sound 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 that let you make the earpiece louder and with a built-in flashing light to attract your attention when the phone rings. And some phones have an inductive coupler in the handset. This means they are hearing aid compatible – you can use the phone with a hearing aid that has a 'T' setting. 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. All corded phones are analogue and cordless phones can be either analogue or digital. Cordless digital phones can cause severe interference with some hearing aids, although this is less likely if you have one of the newer digital hearing aids. Some phones may work better for you than others – so if you can, try before buying.

See our factsheet, **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 from another textphone in reply. Some textphones have a voice telephone handset while others are designed to be used with a separate voice telephone.

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. You type what you want to say and an operator will relay what you say to the person on the telephone.

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



Mobile phones

Mobile phones come equipped with a range of ringtones 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 **may** be severely delayed.

All mobile phones in the UK are digital. Unfortunately, these can cause severe interference with some hearing aids. We strongly advise you – if you can – 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 cause interference 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, **Mobile phones**.



Mobile textphones

Vodafone is now the only supplier of the RNID mobile textphone (<http://www.vodafone.co.uk/deaf>).

Orange allow you to attach a textphone to most mobile phones available on their network (<http://www.orange.co.uk/disabilityservices/choosing.html>).

RNID also runs a new service that lets you make mobile textphone calls. If you already have a Nokia 9500, 6820, 6822 or a Sony Ericsson P900, P910 and want to give this a try, please email ict@rnid.org.uk for more information.

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. This includes some digital cordless phones.

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.

See our factsheet, **Videophones**.

What is listening equipment?

Listening equipment amplifies sound (makes it louder). You can plug some listening equipment directly into your television or stereo for the best sound quality. Other listening equipment is supplied with a microphone, which you can place near the loudspeaker on your television or stereo, or use for conversations. Listening equipment can be used with headphones, a neckloop or ear hooks. If your hearing aid has a 'T' switch or 'T' programme, choose the 'T' setting with a neckloop or ear hook.

Conversation aid

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, such as stetoclips, earphones, neckloops, ear hooks, or headphones. Some also have an in-built telecoil for listening via loop systems. More advanced radio microphone systems can also be used to listen at a distance in conferences, meetings or in more difficult listening situations.

Headphones

Some televisions and nearly all stereos have a headphone socket, so you can plug in headphones, letting you have the sound louder without disturbing other people. Some kinds of headphones, such as over-the-ear and in-the-ear models are designed for hearing people, but you may also find them useful if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

See page 13 for information about cordless infrared and cordless FM headphones.



A loop system can help you to hear sound more clearly if you use a hearing aid with a 'T' setting or loop listener, because it helps to reduce background noise. At home, for example, a loop system may be used to pick up sound from your television, hi-fi or radio. You can also fit one in your car. A loop system can also be set up with a microphone to help hearing aid users hear conversations in noisy places, such as a post office counter or railway station.

How does a loop system work?

A loop system converts the sounds it picks up into magnetic inductive signals. When these signals reach your hearing aid or loop listener, they are converted back into sound you can hear.

See our factsheet, [Induction loop and infrared systems](#).

Loops in public places

You will find loops in public places such as theatres and cinemas. Banks and post offices often have loop systems at the counter. You may have seen signs for them, like the one here.



Fitting a loop system

A loop system consists of a long length of wire, which has both ends attached to the loop amplifier. You can fit a loop system in your home yourself, following the manufacturer's instructions.

How do I use a loop system?

If you wear a hearing aid, you need to switch it to the 'T' setting or loop position. If you don't wear a hearing aid, you can still use a loop system, but you will need hand-held, battery-operated listening equipment that has a loop listening facility.

What is an infrared system?

An infrared system is an alternative to a loop system. The signal is transmitted by invisible infrared light rather than by magnetic field.

How does an infrared system work?

An infrared system comprises two parts – a transmitter you place near the source of sound (such as a TV set or stereo) and a receiver unit. The receiver may be built into a listening aid. Most commonly, these have short tubes that convey the sound to your ears. However, some types of receiver units have an induction neckloop so you can listen through your hearing aids when on the 'T' setting.

See our factsheet, [Induction loop and infrared systems](#).

Infrared systems in public places

You will find infrared systems installed in venues such as theatres, cinemas and lecture halls. You will be able to collect the listening unit from the reception desk.



Cordless headphones

Cordless headphones are designed to receive radio or infrared signals from a transmitter connected to a source of sound, such as a TV set or stereo. Since light cannot travel through walls, you can only receive infrared within the room in which it is transmitted. Walls, on the other hand, do not stop radio signals – so you can use radio cordless headphones to listen as you move around your home.

See our factsheet, [Listening equipment](#).

What are neckloops and ear hooks?

A neckloop is a small induction loop you wear around your neck. Ear hooks fit over the ear, next to your hearing aid(s). You need to switch your hearing aid to its 'T' setting, and it will then pick up a signal from the neckloop or ear hooks. You can plug neckloops and ear hooks into the headphone socket on your television, mobile phone stereo or into listening equipment. You may need an extension lead to plug your neckloop or ear hook into the headphone socket.

How can I get subtitles on TV?

Subtitles on digital television

Digital television is available from Freeview, Sky and cable. Subtitles on digital television are not part of teletext, as they are on analogue TV, so you cannot get them by pressing '888' on the remote control.

Freeview

This has digital (DVB) subtitles and is available in many areas of the UK through a rooftop aerial. To find out if you can receive Freeview, visit www.freeview.co.uk or contact any TV retailer. You can get Freeview using a set-top box connected to your existing television. Also, some of the latest televisions now include a built-in Freeview tuner. Some remote controls have a special subtitle button, or go to the on-screen instructions using your remote control.

You can record digital subtitles using any video or other recording device as long as it is connected to your Freeview set-top box – or if you have a television that has Freeview built in. Some DVD and hard disk recorders have Freeview built in and can record subtitles. But only one video recorder (the Daewoo SV-900) has built-in Freeview and can record subtitles.

Satellite (Sky Digital)

Subscribing to Sky Digital or signing up to their free non-subscription service (called 'Freesat from Sky') is another way to receive digital television. You can record digital subtitles using any video or digital recording device connected to your Sky set-top box. Alternatively, you could subscribe to the Sky+ subscription package. This includes a special Sky+ box which lets you watch programmes with subtitles while recording other programmes with subtitles at the same time.

In 2006, a new rival free satellite service, also called Freesat, will be launched by BBC and ITV.

Cable

Subtitles are available on most cable services. To receive cable television, you need to sign up to your local cable company. You can record digital subtitles using any video or digital recording device connected to your cable set-top box.

Subtitles on analogue television


To get 888 subtitles on analogue television, you need a television that has teletext. To display the subtitles, press the teletext button on the remote control, followed by 888. Some remote controls have a direct subtitle button. If you don't have a teletext television, you can buy a Telemole teletext adaptor, which lets you view 888 subtitles on any non-teletext analogue television. However, as a Telemole costs more than £200, you may want to consider digital television and buy a cheaper Freeview set-top box that provides digital subtitles instead.

Analogue television will be switched off in some areas as early as 2008, so it's probably a good idea to think about digital television now.

How can I record subtitles from analogue television?

If you decide to buy a Telemole teletext adaptor, you can use this to record 888 subtitles, using any video recording device. You cannot reliably record 888 subtitles unless you use the Telemole.

Subtitles on pre-recorded videotapes

Many pre-recorded videotapes have specially coded subtitles called 'closed-caption subtitles'. Look out for this symbol  on the video box. To display closed-caption subtitles on your television, you need a closed-caption decoder. This is sometimes called a video-caption reader or video reader. Closed caption decoders connect to your television and video recorder.

Subtitles on DVDs

Many DVDs have subtitles in English. Some DVDs also have subtitles for deaf and hard of hearing people that are more descriptive. You will find information about subtitles on the DVD box. You have to select subtitles from an on-screen menu that appears when you play the DVD. You don't need any extra equipment to view them.



Can I get equipment to help manage my 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 and 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.

Contact the Information Line for more information.

Where can I buy equipment?

Go to our website at www.rnid.org.uk for up-to-date information about some of the products covered in this leaflet. Or contact our Information Line for a copy of our *Solutions* catalogue, which features a range of products for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Can I get 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:

- 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.

Want to know more?

Make sure you continue to get up-to-date information about deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus by joining RNID.

Our lively, bi-monthly, award-winning magazine, *One in Seven*, is packed full of useful information and advice, including product reviews, reader views and news and events.

How to join

Anyone can be a member, and it costs from £12.50 a year.

To join:

- visit www.rnid.org.uk/join or
- call **0845 634 0679** (tel/textphone) or
- fill in the coupon over the page.

You can save money by paying by direct debit.

Contact us for more information:

Membership team

RNID

19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL

Tel/textphone **0845 634 0679**

membership@rnid.org.uk

www.rnid.org.uk/join



Yes, I want to join RNID

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

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Email _____

Telephone _____ Textphone _____

Please accept my membership payment: (tick relevant boxes)

£21 standard rate (or £17.50 if you pay by direct debit)

£14 If you are retired, unwaged or a full-time student
(or £12.50 if you pay by direct debit)

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 credit card/debit card/CharityCard

(delete as appropriate)

Card number (Visa/Mastercard/Maestro/CharityCard)

Issue no

Signature _____ Expiry date ____/____/____

Please return this form to:

RNID, FREEPOST LON13186, London EC1B 1AL

Occasionally, we may want to let you know about the work we are doing.
If you would prefer not to be contacted in this way please tick this box.

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

From time to time we would like to contact you by email. Please tick here if
you would like to receive emails from us.

Where can I get further information?

You might find some of our other factsheets or leaflets useful:

- Alarm clocks (factsheet)
- Baby monitors (factsheet)
- How to get subtitles (factsheet)
- Doorbells (factsheet)
- Induction loop & infrared systems – a guide for deaf people (factsheet)
- Induction loop & infrared systems – for people managing public venues (factsheet)
- Listening equipment (factsheet)
- Mobile phones (factsheet)
- Multi-alerting systems (factsheet)
- Smoke alarm systems (factsheet)
- Telephones (factsheet)
- Textphones (factsheet)
- Videophones (factsheet)
- The facts: hearing aids (leaflet)
- The facts: tinnitus (leaflet)

Please contact the Information Line for free copies of these.

And let us know if you would like any of them – or this leaflet –
in Braille, large print or audio format.



We're RNID, the charity working to change the world for the UK's 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people.

There are a number of
ways to find out more

www.rnid.org.uk

Information line

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

Or write to us

informationline@rnid.org.uk

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