Understanding hearing loss

People who are hard of hearing have some degree of hearing loss and often use aids to assist in communication, such as assistive listening devices, hearing aids or cochlear implants.

A person who is hard of hearing may choose to communicate using spoken language, in contrast to someone who is Deaf and chooses to communicate using sign language.

The impact of hearing loss

Hearing and quality of life are closely linked. Hearing loss can impact a person’s social, emotional, psychological and physical well being.

People with a hearing loss can experience:

- embarrassment and depression
- loss of confidence
- irritability, frustration and anger
- feeling as though they are being ignored
- dependence on others
- withdrawal, isolation and loneliness
- exclusion from family and social activities
- fatigue.

Poor hearing affects both the person with the hearing loss and those they communicate with. Hearing loss can also place very real strains upon relationships.

Family members and close friends of people with hearing loss may find themselves:

- continually having to explain or interpret
- making assumptions about what the person with the hearing loss thinks or needs
- frustrated or tired
- feeling embarrassed in the company of others.

Signs that may indicate hearing loss

Someone who has hearing loss may display one or more of the following signs:

- difficulty understanding you or asking to have things repeated
- giving no response when there is no eye contact
- not reacting to loud noises
- not responding appropriately when spoken to, for example blank looks, smiling, nodding
- trouble hearing when spoken to from another room or complaining that people are mumbling
- trouble hearing when it is noisy or has trouble hearing in group settings
- turning the volume of the television or radio up loudly in order to hear it
- difficulty discriminating speech sounds, for example they can hear your voice, they just can’t understand what you are saying
- trouble hearing when the speaker’s face is not visible or watching the speaker’s mouth intensely
- straining to hear what you are saying and frequently responding with ‘what?’ or ‘huh?’
- having a nasal voice or unclear speech, for example monotone voice, emphasised words incorrectly or mispronouncing them
- feeling tense, anxious or fatigue in social situations
- demonstrating physical signs of hearing loss, for example frowning as if in deep concentration, tilting their head to the sound source, or adjusting their hearing aids
- misunderstanding conversations or ignoring sounds coming from behind them
- complaining of buzzing or clicking sounds in their ear.

For more information


Some information has been adapted from: