

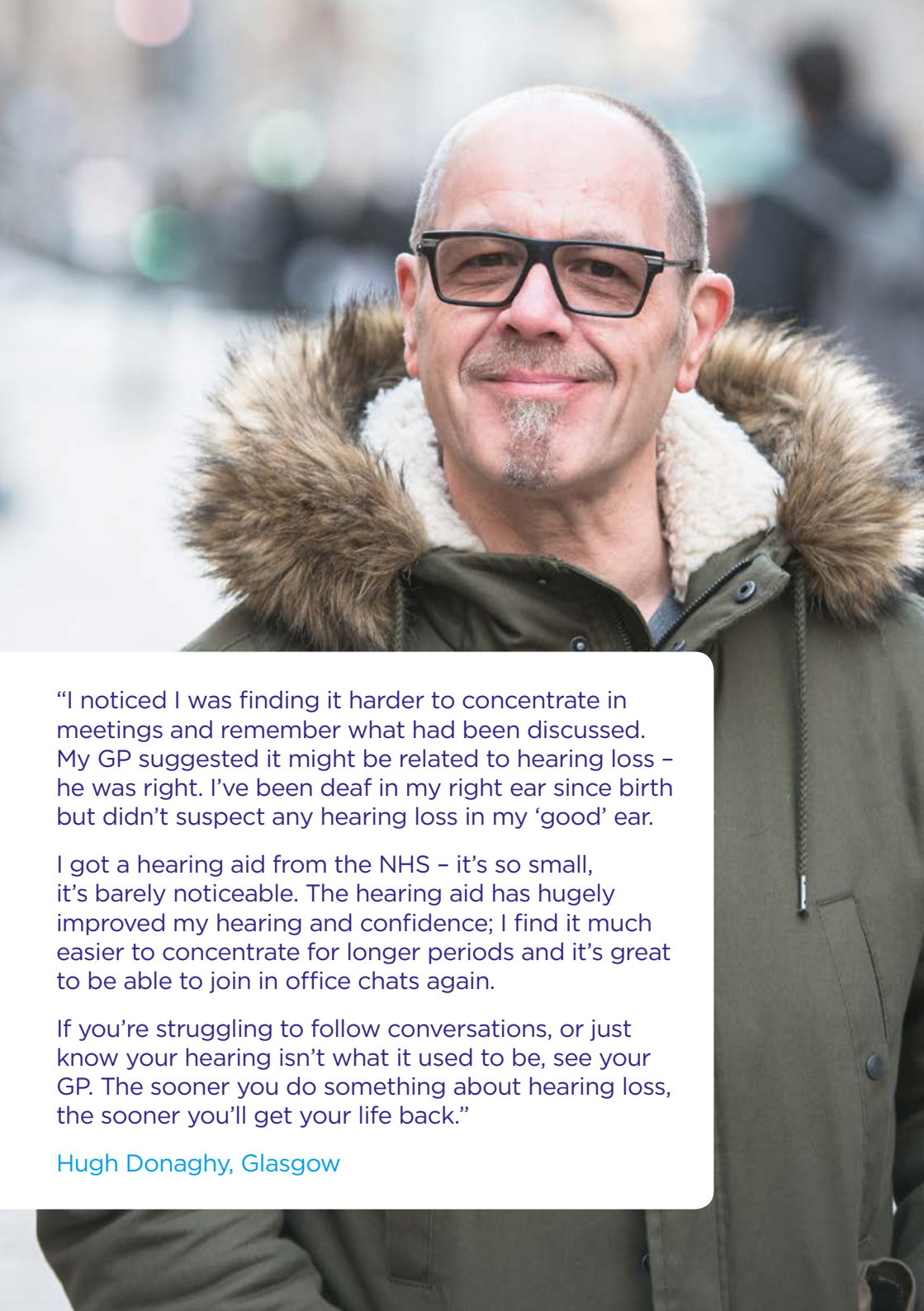
How's your hearing?

 **ACTION ON
HEARING
LOSS**

A national charity since 1911



Formerly
RNID •)))



“I noticed I was finding it harder to concentrate in meetings and remember what had been discussed. My GP suggested it might be related to hearing loss – he was right. I’ve been deaf in my right ear since birth but didn’t suspect any hearing loss in my ‘good’ ear.

I got a hearing aid from the NHS – it’s so small, it’s barely noticeable. The hearing aid has hugely improved my hearing and confidence; I find it much easier to concentrate for longer periods and it’s great to be able to join in office chats again.

If you’re struggling to follow conversations, or just know your hearing isn’t what it used to be, see your GP. The sooner you do something about hearing loss, the sooner you’ll get your life back.”

Hugh Donaghy, Glasgow

If your hearing isn’t what it used to be, you’re not alone: 11 million people in the UK have hearing loss – that’s one in six of us. This leaflet tells you how to get your hearing tested and what can help you to manage hearing loss, so you can get back to what you’ve been missing.

Contents

- What are the signs of hearing loss? 4
- How can I get my hearing tested? 5
- How will my hearing be tested? 7
- What happens if the tests show hearing loss? 8
- What can help me manage my hearing loss? 9
- What hearing research is Action on Hearing Loss funding?12
- Where can I get more information?15

Please let our Information Line know if you’d like this leaflet in large print, braille or audio (see back page for contact details).

What are the signs of hearing loss?

You might not notice a change in your hearing at first, but there are some common signs of hearing loss to look out for:

- Do you turn up the TV louder than your family wants it?
- Do you find it hard to follow conversations in pubs and restaurants?
- Do you struggle to hear on the phone?
- Do you often ask people to repeat what they say?
- Does your partner complain that you don't listen to them?
- Do you find others mumble?

If you answer **yes** to any of these questions, you may want to take the **Action on Hearing Loss Hearing Check** (see below).

If you suddenly lose hearing in one or both ears, call your GP or NHS 111 as soon as possible.

Check your hearing

Our quick and easy Hearing Check isn't a full hearing test, but it will indicate whether your hearing is in the normal range or if you should see your GP.

The benefit of taking the Hearing Check is that if it suggests you have hearing loss, we'll send you a statement of the results that you can take along to your GP – this might make it easier for you to get a referral to an NHS audiologist (hearing specialist) for a hearing test.

You can take the Hearing Check over the phone on **0844 800 3838** (local rate) or online at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/hearingcheck



What's that noise?

If you hear ringing, buzzing or any other sound in your ear(s) or head when there's no external source, it could be tinnitus – a condition often associated with hearing loss. There are different therapies and products to help with tinnitus – see your GP, who can refer you to a specialist.



Find out more in our leaflet *Understanding tinnitus*.

How can I get my hearing tested?

NHS hearing tests

To have your hearing tested for free on the NHS, it's likely that you'll need your GP to refer you to an NHS audiology service. Although, in some parts of the country, you can contact your local audiology service directly to book your hearing test – your GP surgery can tell you if this is an option for you.

Your GP will ask you questions about your hearing difficulties and use a small handheld torch with a magnifying lens to look inside your ears. They may also carry out some simple hearing tests.

If there isn't an obvious cause of your hearing difficulties, your GP should refer you to an audiologist for a full hearing assessment. Remember, you have the right to have your hearing tested, especially if hearing difficulties are interfering with your everyday life.

Choosing an NHS audiology service

The Any Qualified Provider (AQP) scheme in England means that private audiology services can also provide NHS audiology services for adults.

If AQP is available in your area, you might be able to choose where you go for your NHS hearing care – for example, a hospital clinic or a high-street optician providing NHS audiology services. Your care, and any hearing aid(s) you need, will be free.

If AQP isn't available in your area, you should still be able to discuss with your GP which local hospital or clinic you'd like to go to for your hearing tests. To find out more, speak to your GP.

Private hearing tests

To have your hearing tested at a private audiology service, you don't need a referral from your GP – you can book an appointment directly.

Many private audiology services offer free hearing tests, but you'll normally have to pay for any hearing aids you need. Modern digital hearing aids are free from the NHS.



See our leaflet [Getting hearing aids to find out more about NHS and private hearing aids](#).

Why it's a good idea to see your GP first

Even if you don't need a referral to have your hearing tested, you may wish to see your GP first anyway, so they can check for any causes of hearing loss that can be easily treated, such as an ear infection or ear-wax blockage.

How will my hearing be tested?

Whether you have your hearing tested through the NHS or privately, an audiologist will carry out tests to find out what type and level of hearing loss you have. Before they begin, they'll ask you about your hearing and check your ears. They'll then test one ear at a time. The tests last about 20 minutes and aren't uncomfortable.

For the standard hearing test, called audiometry, you'll listen to noises through a set of headphones. You'll hear sounds of different tones and volumes and will be asked to press a button each time you hear a sound. The noises will gradually become quieter to find the softest sounds that you can hear. The results will be recorded on a chart called an audiogram.

The audiologist might then ask you to wear a headband with a vibrating pad. This pad sends sound through the bones in your head directly to the cochlea (the hearing organ in your inner ear), on both sides of your head. Again, you'll be asked to press a button each time you hear a sound. This test checks whether the cochlea and hearing nerve are working or damaged.

At some point, the audiologist might play a rushing noise into one ear to cover up sounds while they test your other ear.

Some audiology services vary in the tests they carry out in first appointments, and you might have further tests to find out more about your ears and hearing.


What happens if the tests show hearing loss?

If you are diagnosed with hearing loss, the audiologist will explain the type of hearing loss that you have. It will either be sensorineural, conductive or mixed.

- **Sensorineural hearing loss** is caused by damage to the cochlea within the inner ear or the hearing nerve, or both. It is permanent and is most often caused by the normal ageing process (this is the single biggest cause of hearing loss). It changes your ability to hear quiet sounds and reduces the quality of the sounds that you hear, making it difficult to understand speech.
- **Conductive hearing loss** is caused when sound waves can't pass freely to the inner ear. It's usually caused by a blockage or problem in the outer or middle ear. This type of hearing loss is usually temporary and can often be treated with medication or minor surgery. But, in some cases, it can be permanent.
- **Mixed hearing loss** is a combination of sensorineural and conductive hearing loss.

The audiologist will also tell you your level of hearing loss (mild, moderate, severe or profound). They'll discuss whether hearing aids are likely to help you, or if you could have some other treatment.

You may also be given information about assistive technology and support services that can help you to manage your hearing loss.

 See our leaflet *Ear problems and treatments* to find out more about the different causes of hearing loss.

What can help me manage my hearing loss?

We're funding research to develop new treatments and cures for hearing loss (see page 12). In the meantime, there are many things that can help you to minimise the effect it has on your life.

Hearing aids

In most cases, hearing aids will be recommended. Hearing aids don't reverse hearing loss, but they can be a great help. They should make sounds loud enough for you to hear at a comfortable level and make conversations easier. You can get digital hearing aids and batteries free from the NHS, or you can buy them privately.

There are also extra benefits of using hearing aids:

- you won't have to concentrate as much or strain to hear, so you'll feel less tired
- they will help you to communicate with others, so they can help to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness
- it's suggested that hearing aids help to boost your memory and thinking abilities, as your brain is being stimulated
- some experts say that getting hearing aids may even reduce the risks of developing dementia.

Research shows that the earlier you get hearing aids after being diagnosed with hearing loss, the more benefit you'll get from them.

If you are severely or profoundly deaf in both ears, a cochlear implant may be suitable.

 See our leaflet *Getting hearing aids and our factsheet Cochlear implants*.

Hearing therapists

Hearing therapists, or specially trained audiologists, can advise on hearing aids and ways to make communicating easier. They can also offer help if you have tinnitus and find it troublesome. Unfortunately, hearing therapists aren't available at every hospital, but your hearing specialist may be able to refer you to your nearest one if you'd like additional support for your hearing loss or tinnitus.

Communication tips

Simple communication tips will help you in most day-to-day situations:

- Tell the person you're speaking to that you have hearing loss.
- Ask people to get your attention before they start talking to you.
- If necessary, ask people to slow down and speak more clearly.
- If you don't catch what someone says, just ask them to say it again or in a different way. No one hears correctly all the time!

 For more tips, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communicationtips

Learning to lipread

You'll benefit from learning to lipread as soon as you're diagnosed with hearing loss. It involves watching the lip shapes, gestures and facial movements of the person you are talking to – and using context to fill in gaps in conversation. Our research shows that lipreading classes can really improve communication and help people to better manage their hearing loss.

 See our leaflet *Learning to lipread*.

Assistive products and technology

There's a wide range of assistive technology and products designed for people with hearing loss. For example:

- conversation listeners that can help you hear speech
- TV listeners that can help you hear the TV
- telephones that are compatible with hearing aids
- alerting devices for sounds like the doorbell or fire alarm – these usually have a loud ring, flashing lights and a vibrating pad.

You can also connect most hearing aids to Bluetooth-enabled devices, such as your smartphone, by using a small device called a Bluetooth streamer. This provides a wireless connection between the hearing aids and the electronic device. Once you're connected, all sound (including music and phone calls) will go directly into your hearing aids, helping you to hear better over background noise.

Some hearing aids, called Made for iPhone (MFi) hearing aids, can connect to certain Apple devices (the iPhone, iPad and iPod touch) directly, without the need of a streamer.

 See our leaflet *Products to help with hearing loss and tinnitus*.

Accessible entertainment

Most TV programmes, and many DVDs, are subtitled. Some venues, such as theatres and cinemas, have captioned or signed performances or screenings. They may also have hearing loop or infrared systems to help you hear over background noise. Many museums and art galleries offer tours that are accessible to people with hearing loss.

 See our leaflet *Enjoying TV, film and the arts*.

Other support

Depending on how your hearing loss affects your day-to-day life, you may be entitled to certain disability benefits and other practical support. If hearing loss affects your ability to work, you may be entitled to an Access to Work grant from the government, to cover the cost of any equipment or communication support that you need.

i See our leaflets *Benefits and support services* and *Using communication support*.

What hearing research is Action on Hearing Loss funding?

Since 1999, we have funded world-class research and training, and in 2013 we merged with Deafness Research UK to create the world's largest charitable funding programme dedicated to advancing treatments for hearing loss and tinnitus.

Collectively, to date, we've invested around £29m into hearing research – research from which people are already benefiting through the technology used to screen the hearing of newborn babies, cochlear implants and advances in the fitting of hearing aids.

We have launched the careers of several research leaders, and our funding has resulted in key scientific advances and opened up new areas of research that may lead to new ways of treating hearing loss and tinnitus. We are continuing to work with universities, companies and investors to make sure new treatments for hearing loss and tinnitus are developed as quickly as possible.

i Find out more about the research we fund at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/biomedicalresearch



Stay informed

Become a member today to receive regular, up-to-date information on deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

From as little as £12.50 a year, you'll receive:

- Our **quarterly members' magazine** and **monthly emails**.
- **Product reviews, biomedical research and technology updates**.
- **10% discount*** on products from our online shop and catalogue.
- The opportunity to **influence our future direction** by voting in Trustee elections.



Join today:

- Complete and return the form overleaf.
- Call **0333 320 6995** (telephone) or **020 7296 8246** (textphone).
- Join online at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/join

* Minimum spend is £40 excluding postage and packaging and VAT.
Action on Hearing Loss reserves the right to change the promotion at any time.

1. Your details (please print in block capitals, with a ballpoint pen)

Name	Tel
Address	Textphone
Postcode	Email

Stay in touch: We'll continue to keep in touch with you to share the impact of your Membership, because your ongoing support is crucial in helping people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. If you'd like to opt out of these communications, or change the way you hear from us, please contact our Supporter Care Team: **0333 320 6995** or supportercare@hearingloss.org.uk

How we use your personal information: We will only use your personal information to keep in touch with you about the impact you have made and how you can help fund our work.

We believe we have a legitimate interest to use your information in this way, based on our relationship with you. However, you have the right to object, or change how we use your information, at any time, using the contact details opposite. In order to ensure we are legally compliant, we will store your information securely for a maximum of ten years from your last donation, when it will be securely destroyed. To find out more about what we mean by legitimate interests, how we will protect your personal information, and your rights, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/privacypolicy

2. Please select payment option

- Payment by Direct Debit – fill in the details below.
- Payment by credit/debit card or cheque – please send me an application form.

Payment by Direct Debit

I would like to make a payment of:

- £12.50 Concession rate*
- £17.50 Standard rate

* Retired, unwaged or a full-time student

Each year from the:

- 1st
- 15th

of the next available month

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit



Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	

Name(s) of account holder(s)

--

Bank/building society account number

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Branch sort code

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Service user number

2	5	0	9	0	1
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Reference

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Instruction to your bank or building society

Please pay Action on Hearing Loss Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Action on Hearing Loss and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

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Date

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Where can I get more information?

Action on Hearing Loss has a wide range of information on all aspects of deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. We have the latest information on hearing health, hearing aids and cochlear implants, assistive technology and products, communication support, rights and benefits.

You can also find out about services in your area, becoming a member and receiving our magazine, the latest research developments, and getting involved as a volunteer or supporter.

Visit our website – actiononhearingloss.org.uk – or contact our free, confidential Information Line (see back page for contact details).

To see our full range of leaflets and factsheets, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/publications

Information you can trust

The Information Standard certifies us as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. For a list of references for this leaflet, please email references@hearingloss.org.uk

Thank you to **Lynette A Elliott**, Audiology Services Manager at Windsor Audiology Centre, for reviewing this leaflet.

Did you find this information helpful?

Please tell us what you think of this leaflet. Did you find it useful? Could we improve it? Please let us know by emailing reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk

If you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create and review information for our website and publications, please let us know.

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Questions about deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss?

Contact our free, confidential Information Line:

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

SMS 0780 000 0360
(standard text message rates apply)

Email information@hearingloss.org.uk

Join us

 Action on Hearing Loss

 @ActionOnHearing



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