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How's your hearing?

Action on Hearing Loss

actiononhearingloss.org.uk



**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

“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. One in six people in the UK has hearing loss, and more and more people are getting the help they need to hear better.

In this leaflet we tell you how you can get your hearing tested and what can help with hearing loss, so you can get back to what you've been missing.

Contents

- How can I tell if I have hearing loss? **page 4**
- Where can I get my hearing tested? **page 5**
- How will my hearing be tested? **page 7**
- What happens if the tests show I have hearing loss? **page 8**
- What can help me manage my hearing loss? **page 9**
- What can I do to make communication easier? **page 12**
- What hearing research is Action on Hearing Loss funding? **page 13**
- Where can I get more information and support? **page 14**

How can I tell if I have hearing loss?

Ask yourself:

- Do you turn up the TV louder than your family wants it?
- Do you find it hard to follow conversation 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, take our quick and easy Hearing Check and make an appointment to see your GP.

Check your hearing

The **Action on Hearing Loss Hearing Check** isn't a full hearing test, but it will indicate whether your hearing is in the normal range or if you should have further tests.

The benefit of taking the Hearing Check is that if it does suggest 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 audiologist (hearing specialist) for further tests.

Take our 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, whistling or buzzing sounds 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.

More information: Find out more in our leaflet 'Understanding tinnitus'.

Where can I get my hearing tested?

To have your hearing tested, you can either see your GP and ask for a referral to an NHS hearing service, or go to a private hearing care provider.

You don't need to see your GP if you want to go private, but we recommend you do, so your GP can check for any temporary causes of hearing loss, such as an ear infection, which can be treated. Your GP will ask you about your symptoms, look in your ears and may carry out some simple tests. If there's no obvious cause of your hearing loss, you'll need further hearing tests.

To have your hearing tested on the NHS, your GP needs to refer you to a hearing specialist. You may need to insist on this. **Remember, you have the right to have your hearing tested, especially if hearing difficulties are interfering with your everyday life.**

If you choose to have your hearing tested by a private hearing care provider, remember that you'll have to pay for any hearing aids you need, whereas modern, digital hearing aids are free from the NHS.

More information: See our leaflet '**Getting hearing aids**' to find out more.

Your choice of hearing care provider

The Any Qualified Provider (AQP) scheme in England means that private hearing care providers can deliver NHS adult-audiology services, providing they meet set requirements.

If audiology services are available through AQP in your area, and you meet the qualifying criteria, you might be able to choose which service your GP refers you to. 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 would like to go to for your hearing tests. To find out more, speak to your GP.

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 (**see page 8**). 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, 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/or the 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 I have hearing loss?

If you are diagnosed with hearing loss, see it as the first step to getting the help you need to hear better.

Your 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 hair cells within the inner ear. It is permanent and most often caused by age-related 'wear and tear' within the inner ear (this is the single biggest cause of hearing loss).
- **Conductive hearing loss** is caused when sound waves can't pass freely from the outer ear to the inner ear – for example, because of a blockage or infection in the ear canal. 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 the different types of equipment and support that can help you to manage your hearing loss (see 'What can help me manage my hearing loss?', **see page 9**).

More information: 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 13**). In the meantime, there are lots of things that can help you to manage your hearing loss and minimise the impact that it has on your life.

Hearing aids

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 conversation easier to hear. You can get digital hearing aids and batteries for free from the NHS, or you can buy them privately. Your audiologist will let you know whether hearing aids could help you.

If you are profoundly deaf, a cochlear implant may be suitable. If you are interested in this, ask your audiologist for a referral to a specialist implant service for an assessment.

Some new hearing aids that you can buy privately can connect via the internet to alerting devices such as doorbells and kitchen appliances. So, when one of these devices makes a sound, it's sent directly to your hearing aids. You can connect other types of hearing aid to Bluetooth-compatible devices through a Bluetooth streamer (**see page 10**).

More information: See our leaflet '**Getting hearing aids**' or our factsheet '**Cochlear implants**'.

Hearing therapists

Hearing therapists or specially trained audiologists can advise on hearing aids and ways to improve communication. They can also offer help to minimise the distress of persistent tinnitus. Unfortunately, hearing therapists aren't available at every hospital, but your hearing specialist will refer you to your nearest one – you might have to travel a little.

Products

There are many useful products available:

- **assistive listening devices** – including conversation listeners, TV listeners and hearing loop and infrared systems – can help you to hear speech, the TV and other sounds more clearly
- **amplified telephones** and **textphones** can help you keep in touch with your friends and family
- **alerting devices** can let you know when your doorbell, smoke alarm or phone is ringing – they usually have a combination of a loud ring, flashing lights and a vibrating pad. You may be able to connect some Bluetooth-connected alerting devices to your hearing aids through a Bluetooth streamer, which means the sound of the device is directly transferred to your ears through your hearing aids.

More information: See our leaflet '**Products to help with hearing loss and tinnitus**'.

Learning to lipread

You'll benefit from learning to lipread as soon as you are diagnosed with hearing loss. Lipreading 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 recent research shows that lipreading classes can really improve communication and help people to better manage their hearing loss.

More information: See our leaflet '**Learning to lipread**'.

Accessible entertainment

Most TV programmes, and many DVDs, are subtitled. Some venues, such as theatres and cinemas, have special captioned or signed performances or screenings, and/or they may have hearing loop or infrared systems to help you hear over background noise.

Many museums and art galleries also offer tours that are accessible to people with hearing loss.

More information: See our leaflet '**Enjoying TV, film and the arts**'.

Other support

Depending on your level of hearing loss and how it affects your day-to-day life, you might be entitled to financial help, assistive equipment and other support services. For example, if you need support to communicate or take notes at work or at the doctor's, there's a range of communication support available to meet your needs. You shouldn't have to pay for this support.

More information: See our leaflets 'Understanding benefits' and 'Using communication support'.

What can I do to make communication easier?

These 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.
- Learn to lipread by joining a lipreading class.
- Get a better view: stand a reasonable distance from the person speaking, so you can see their face and lips.
- 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!

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 have invested over £27m 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.

More information: To find out more about the research we fund, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/biomedicalresearch

Where can I get more information and support?

Action on Hearing Loss has a wide range of expert information on deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss, and what can help you take control: choosing hearing aids and products, learning to lipread, understanding your rights, and getting the right support.

You can find our leaflets and factsheets on our website at **actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets** or order copies from our Information Line – call **0808 808 0123**, send a text message to **07800 000360** or email **information@hearingloss.org.uk**. Please let us know if you'd like our information in large print, Braille or audio.

You can also contact our **Information Line** or visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk** for free, reliable information, and to find out about: services in your area, becoming a member and receiving our magazine, the latest research developments, choosing the right products, and getting involved as a volunteer or supporter.

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?

We'd love to know what you think of this leaflet – please email us at **reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk**

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

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- Health and care information you can trust
The Information Standard: Certified Member
- FR: Registered with Fundraising Regulator
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- Investors in People



Published: **January 2017**. Version 3. Review date: **June 2018**.
Action on Hearing Loss is the trading name of The Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

A registered charity in England and Wales (207720) and Scotland (SC038926). A1450/0518