

# A Basic Guide to *the Signs and Treatment of* Hearing Loss



*This guide is intended for anyone concerned about their own hearing loss or the hearing loss of a loved one. In it, we'll help you identify the early signs of hearing loss and cover some of the treatment options. We'll also explore some tips on talking to a loved one about hearing loss.*

## Hearing Loss Today

- Approximately 38 million Americans have hearing loss<sup>1</sup>
- 1 in 5 US adults have some form of hearing loss<sup>2</sup>
- 1 in 3 people over 65 have hearing loss<sup>2</sup>
- 50% of people over 75 have hearing loss<sup>2</sup>
- 60% of people with hearing loss are still in the workforce<sup>3</sup>
- Hearing loss is the 3rd largest chronic health problem in the US<sup>2</sup>

As you can see, hearing loss is a common health concern. Although hearing aids are the best treatment for 95% of people with hearing loss<sup>4</sup>, sometimes outdated ideas of what a hearing aid is and how it works prevent people from considering them as treatment.

For example, it's a widespread perception that hearing aids are bulky, uncomfortable, difficult to deal with, and don't provide much help anyway. You may have other reasons to be hesitant about using hearing aids. Ultimately though, resolving your hearing loss will likely require the use of hearing aids.

The good news is that hearing aids have come a long way in the last ten years. They're smaller, lighter, smarter,

and more effective than ever. Those who are able to overcome their initial hesitation usually discover that the benefits of hearing aids far outweigh any perceived downsides.

Modern hearing aids exist not only to help you hear better but to help you keep in touch with friends and family, help improve relationships with loved ones, and even help stave off the negative side-effects of untreated hearing loss, like dementia<sup>5</sup> and increased risk of injury<sup>6</sup>.

Before we get into the specifics of how hearing aids can help, you need to take the time to recognize the signs of hearing loss and how it may be affecting your life in ways you may not have even considered.

## 6 Signs of Hearing Loss

### 1. Hearing but not understanding

Most people think experiencing hearing loss is like having the volume turned down on the sounds around you. But that's not a very accurate description. Age-related hearing loss, or *presbycusis*, results in a muffling effect that affects your ability to distinguish between similar *phonemes*—the sound units of speech.

For example, if you're experiencing early stage hearing loss, you may confuse similar-sounding words like:

- “rose” and “roads”
- “sheep” and “cheap”
- “keen” and “king”
- “sheep” and “ship”

Hearing loss also makes it harder to hear “s” sounds at the beginning and ends of words: “cats” becomes “cat” and “stalk” becomes “talk.”

Hearing loss usually begins by muffling high-frequency sounds, like the chirping of birds or women and children's voices, but can leave middle- and low-range sounds unaffected. As it progresses, a larger range of sound becomes softer and more muffled.

Presbycusis can sneak up on you. Many people may not recognize their own hearing loss at first and will instead insist that everyone around them is mumbling. The feeling that everyone around you is not speaking clearly can lead to frustration and even anger as you continually ask people to repeat themselves or speak up.

You may also catch yourself staring at people's lips when they talk or even feeling stressed or exhausted after long conversations because you are concentrating so hard on understanding what's being said.

Misunderstandings happen, but when word confusion and complaints of mumbling become a daily occurrence, these are likely signs of hearing loss and it may be worth getting a hearing exam.

### 2. Turning up the TV or radio

Can't hear the TV? Turn it up. That's a perfectly normal human reaction when you can't understand what's being said.

However, when a “normal” listening level starts to bother family and friends

**PRESBYCUSIS (PRESS-BU-QUE-SIS):**

*Progressive, age-related hearing loss. From the Greek presbys (“elder”) + akousis (“hearing”)*

**PHONEME (FOE-NĒĒM):**

*A basic unit of sound in speech, e.g., uh, sh, ah, ee, sk, etc. From the Greek phónēme (“sound”)*



(and neighbors) on a regular basis, maybe it's time to question if your "normal" level is actually abnormal.

Keep in mind, arguing about what is too loud doesn't make a lot of sense. If other people are complaining on a regular basis about the volume level—specifically while in other rooms or other sections of the house—it's time to think about getting a hearing exam.

### 3. Frustration in social situations

At some time in your life, you've probably bluffed your way through a conversation. Maybe you weren't paying attention or didn't hear what was said, so you feigned a laugh at what you thought was a joke or nodded your head like you were listening the whole time. But when bluffing your way through conversations becomes a daily occurrence, that's a red flag for hearing loss.

Bluffing may only be the tip of the iceberg. You may also feel uncomfortable at family gatherings or in other social situations because you find it hard to understand what's being said or have trouble follow conversations. Even in conversation with as few as three people, you might have a hard time following what's being said and by whom.

One of the most obvious signs of hearing loss in social situations is continually asking people to repeat themselves. But asking the same question over and over again can get tiring and frustrating—for everybody. After you repeatedly ask for clarification, the

## Hearing loss affects your relationships as much as it affects your hearing

speaker may say, "oh, nevermind" or "forget it, it's not a big deal." At best, these dismissals can be frustrating; at worst, they feel belittling.

Experiences like these help reinforce the fact that hearing loss affects your relationships as much as it affects your hearing. If your hearing loss is left untreated, you may be tempted to withdraw from social situations because they can be frustrating and stressful. But retreating from the world is not the answer.

Hearing aids can help you regain a wider range of hearing and help you avoid

#### HOW LOUD IS TOO LOUD?

- 85db is a comfortably loud level that won't damage your hearing. That's about the level of busy city traffic.
- 95db is the level of an average lawn mower. You shouldn't listen to levels like this for more than an hour.
- Over 100db is a dangerous noise level. Rock concerts, jet planes, fireworks, and gunshots are in this range and can seriously damage your hearing with extended and unprotected exposure.



those awkward and sometimes frustrating situations.

#### TIPS FOR SOCIAL SITUATIONS

- *If possible, situate the room so you can see everyone clearly*
- *Stay away from places with a lot of background noise or ambient noise*
- *Minimize distractions by looking directly at the person speaking*

#### 4. Vertigo

Feeling dizzy, but haven't been riding the tea cups at Disneyland? Regular spells of dizziness can be the result of a number of health problems, like ear infections, migraines, head injuries, and more. They can also be a sign of more serious conditions that can lead to hearing loss: Ménière's disease or an acoustic neuroma.

As many as 600,000 people in the US currently suffer from Ménière's disease<sup>7</sup>. Ménière's affects the fluid of the inner ear, causing you to feel dizzy, lose your balance, and have difficulty focusing your eyes. Because Ménière's is a malfunction of the inner ear, it can also adversely affect hearing.

Ménière's can be accompanied by rolling hearing loss—hearing that comes and goes in one or both ears. It may also manifest itself as a temporary buzzing or ringing in the ears. Although the hearing loss may only be partial and temporary, if left untreated it can lead to permanent hearing loss in both ears.

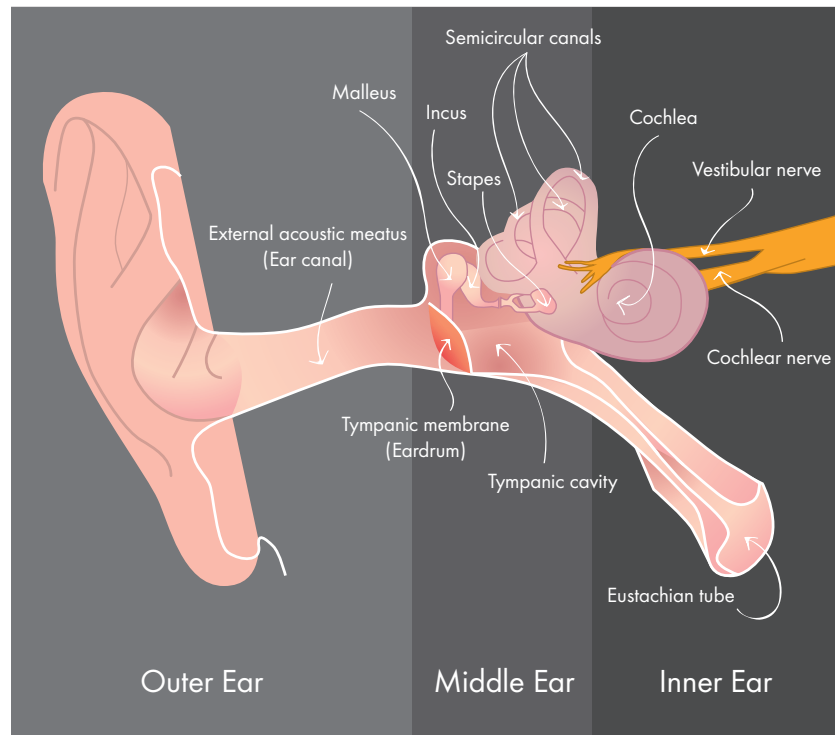
On the other hand, an acoustic neuroma occurs when a benign growth appears on the vestibular nerve—the nerve that sends sound signals to the

brain. An acoustic neuroma will normally result in hearing loss or buzzing and ringing in the ears accompanied by dizziness.

Whenever you have problems with your inner ear—which regulates balance—your hearing may also be affected. In these cases, your hearing loss may be intermittent but could become permanent if the underlying cause is not addressed. If you're experiencing hearing loss accompanied by vertigo, it's time to consult a physician.

#### 5. Ringing in the ears

You've likely had ringing in your ears at some time in your life. You probably had it after attending a sporting event, going to a concert, being around large combustion engines, or after loud explosions. For most of us, it goes away



pretty quickly. But if you're experiencing early hearing loss, it may not.

A persistent ringing in the ears is called tinnitus, and it can be an early sign of sensorineural hearing loss. Although many of us experience noise-induced tinnitus, the ringing in your ears could also be the result of a head injury or a side effect of a medication you're taking. Frequent and unexplained occurrences of tinnitus could also be an early sign of greater hearing problems, but check with your doctor to rule out other factors first.

**SENSORINEURAL (SEN-SORE-ĒĒ-NUR-AL) HEARING LOSS (SNHL):**  
*Relating to neural causes of hearing loss, i.e., malfunction or damage to the inner and middle ear or vestibular nerve.*

**6. Pain, pressure, or irritation in the ears**  
Ear pain is never a good thing. But it doesn't always mean that you're losing your hearing. Sometimes it's just a little earwax buildup.

Earwax buildup is caused by an impaction of earwax due to the use of cotton swabs, rolled up paper, or other methods of sticking something inappropriate in your ear in an attempt to clean it. The impaction can impede sound waves, causing temporary hearing loss. An ENT or audiologist can remove the wax buildup and normal hearing should return.

Another reason you may experience ear pain is an ear infection. Although not as common in adults, ear infections can create pain and pressure in the middle ear and may cause temporary hearing loss. Ear infections may also be accompanied by fever, sleeplessness, irritability, and in some cases a liquid discharge. If you

### Forms of Tinnitus

Tinnitus is usually described as "ringing," but it can also be:

- Buzzing
- Whooshing
- Hissing
- Crickets
- Pulsing
- Clicking
- Screeching
- A high-pitched tone

suspect an ear infection, see an ENT immediately to start antibiotic treatment.

If you've ruled out earwax impaction and ear infections, persistent ear pain could be a sign of irritation, inflammation, or swelling of the middle ear. If left untreated, this type of ear pain

*Frequent and unexplained occurrences of tinnitus could be an early sign of hearing loss*



could lead to further problems, including permanent hearing loss. It's best to get it checked out as soon as possible.

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*Hearing loss can be frustrating and difficult to deal with, but once you've recognized the signs of hearing loss, you're closer to dealing with it in a way that will help you navigate the world more effectively. If you're experiencing any of the above symptoms, take the first step now and get a hearing exam from an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist. ▶*

**ENT** = Ear, nose, and throat doctor, technically known as an Otolaryngologist

**AUDIOLOGIST** = Healthcare specialist in hearing loss diagnosis and treatment

**A FEW WORDS ABOUT EARWAX...**

*Listen, earwax is in your ear to keep it clean and prevent dust and bacteria from getting in. Your body does a pretty good job of pushing it out the end of the ear when it's gotten too old and crusty. It doesn't need your help. Scientifically speaking, there is no reason to clean your ears at all. Especially not with a cotton swab, which could push old crusty earwax back into the ear, cause an impaction, and create bigger problems.*

Do you recognize the signs of hearing loss in your own life?

Watch this online video to help you determine whether you should talk to a doctor about hearing loss.

<http://bit.ly/hearing-test-online>



## Hearing Loss Treatment Options

Once you've determined that you may have hearing loss, and you're willing to seek help, what are your options?

First, schedule a hearing exam with an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist and determine the severity of your loss.

Once you know how severe your hearing loss is, you can explore treatment options. Ultimately, there are three potential ways to treat your hearing loss.

### 1. Do nothing

This is only a short-term solution.

Acknowledging you have hearing loss is a big step toward treatment, and if you've made it this far into the guide, you're probably on the right track already.

Although getting a hearing exam, talking to a doctor, and deciding on the right treatment may feel daunting, the benefits of hearing better far outweigh the costs. Seeking treatment will open up new opportunities and can help you strengthen strained relationships. It doesn't have to be scary, and you're not doing it alone. Your family and friends are there to support you and help you along the way.

### 2. Surgery

Corrective surgery may be an option if your hearing loss is a result of physical damage or malformation of the outer or middle ears, but very few adult patients

qualify for such procedures.

Cochlear implants and bone-anchored hearing aids are serious, invasive procedures for children and adults with conductive hearing loss that is not treatable by other methods. And even then, they may not restore 100% hearing.

Adults with sensorineural hearing loss, like presbycusis, do not generally have hearing loss severe enough to warrant such surgeries.

### 3. Hearing Aids

Hearing aids are an effective treatment for over 95% of people with hearing loss<sup>4</sup>. Hearing aids cannot restore hearing that has already been lost, but they can maximize the range of sound you can still hear. Today, hearing aids are small,



sleek, and technologically advanced. There are even hearing aids that fit completely in your ear canal and literally cannot be seen by other people. The latest digital hearing aids connect with



your smartphone, computer, and TV wirelessly. They come with multiple channels, programs, feedback cancellation, noise suppression, and other high-tech sound enhancement features that help the hearing aids sound more natural and feel more comfortable. They're even smaller and lighter than ever before. Options range from models that fit completely in the ear canal and can't be seen at all to behind the ear options that are compact enough that they are virtually undetectable. The good news is, there's a hearing aid option that works for just about every type of loss, need, and lifestyle.

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*Hearing aids can dramatically improve your life by helping you maintain relationships with the people you love and the world around you. If you suspect hearing loss, an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist can help you determine your level of loss and possible treatment needs.*

*The professional care they provide extends far beyond the exam. They'll ensure your hearing aids fit properly, are programmed correctly, and will even follow up on your progress to ensure you're getting the very best results from your hearing loss treatment plan.*

*Call TruHearing and we'll recommend a hearing healthcare provider close to you and even help you schedule an appointment. Resolve today to address any possible hearing loss you may have. Better hearing and a better quality of life are waiting for you. ■*

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL CARE**

*Your audiologist or hearing instrument specialist will have the biggest impact on your experience with hearing aids aside from the aids themselves. A professional hearing health provider has been trained both medically and technically to understand how your ear works, how sound reacts in your ear, and how to shape and adjust the technical aspect of hearing aids to give you the highest quality sound and fit possible. They will help you adjust to your new life with hearing aids, so it's important to pick someone who is professionally vetted and provides a high level of service to patients.*

*Many insurance companies have local audiology or ENT networks they can refer you to for hearing healthcare. For example, if your health plan is one of TruHearing's insurance partners, you're already connected to a network of providers that has been vetted for superior levels of patient care and a commitment to improving the lives of people with hearing loss.*

## 10 Tips for Talking to a Loved One About Hearing Loss

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Hearing loss is an emotional issue that can stir up feelings of anger, resentment, self-doubt, weakness, and judgment. If approached the wrong way, discussions about hearing loss can be more harmful than helpful.

If you feel a loved one has hearing loss, here are a few things to keep in mind that can help a potentially awkward conversation become a pleasant, positive, and productive one instead.

### 1. Don't place blame or rehash the past

Hearing loss is no one's fault. It's a simple fact of life. When you approach a discussion about hearing loss, stay away from judgment or reliving miscommunications and mistakes of the past. Instead, emphasize positive outcomes, like how your relationship could improve as a result of better hearing.

### 2. Share your feelings

Instead of focusing solely on the person with the loss, talk about how hearing loss affects you and how it could improve your lives. For example:

- “I enjoy talking with you, but I feel frustrated when I’m constantly

repeating myself.”

- “It makes me sad that we don’t go out to restaurants anymore. It’s something I miss and I want to do with you again.”
- “It hurts my feelings that you’ve stopped coming over for family get-togethers. I know they can get noisy, but we all want to spend more time with you.”

### 3. Assume they already know

Chances are, this is not the first time they’ve considered they have hearing loss. They’ve probably known for a while—at least deep down—but have been hesitant to talk about it or admit it to themselves. You can avoid talking down to them by assuming they already know about the loss.

### 4. Express care and concern

Above all, emphasize your concern. You love them, care about them, and want them to have a fantastic quality of life. Always enter a discussion about hearing loss from a place of love and understanding. Never offer ultimatums or insults or try to guilt your loved one into dealing with their hearing loss.

### 5. Offer to get your hearing tested together

It’ll be less stressful and not as scary if you both go. You can even offer to set up the appointment.

### 6. Identify coping mechanisms they may have developed

People with hearing loss often develop coping mechanisms, like concentrating on a speaker’s lips, avoiding noisy social situations, or faking that they understand

what's being said. These coping mechanisms can add stress to their lives and can create embarrassing situations. And they probably think no one has noticed.

Show them you recognize and understand why and how they're using these mechanisms. Show them empathy and focus on how treatment can help them eliminate the need to use them.

### 7. Remind them of the benefits of hearing well

Many people with hearing loss don't realize how much they've been missing or the toll their coping skills may be taking on themselves and those around them. Focus on the positive aspects of hearing well, like being able to listen to children, talking on the phone, watching movies together, or fully participating at family gatherings.

### 8. Create a supportive environment

They know that you love them and care about their continued quality of life, but who's going to help them deal with hearing aids? *You are.*

Let them know they won't be doing it alone. You'll help them learn about and take care of the new hearing aids and make sure they're working properly. You're there for support every step of the way. (Honestly, this means a lot. Doing it together is much less daunting than going it alone.)

### 9. Assure them hearing loss is nothing to be embarrassed about

There are 38 million Americans with hearing loss. That's 1 in 10 Americans,

and nearly 1 in 3 people over 65. Despite popular perception, hearing loss is actually fairly common. In fact you may already know other people with hearing loss who wear hearing aids.

Point these people out. Use their positive examples to show your loved one that hearing loss isn't abnormal and that treatment can help them maintain or improve their quality of life.

### 10. Remind them hearing loss is treatable

Sometimes people are content to live with hearing loss because they don't think there's much they can do about it. But hearing aid technology has come a long way. Today, 95% of hearing loss is treatable and can help individuals enhance their hearing so they experience a full world of sound and better quality of life. Hearing loss treatment through a hearing healthcare professional, like an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist, can also increase your chance of a positive outcome by ensuring your hearing aids fit correctly and are working to your benefit.

#### QUICK TIPS:

- *Focus on the positive*
- *Emphasize your love and concern*
- *Create a supportive environment*
- *Never blame or shame*

## Conclusion

Whether you're concerned about your own hearing loss or the hearing loss of a loved one, keep in mind that it's not a problem isolated to just the individual suffering from hearing loss. It affects everyone they're associated with.

Although the decision to explore hearing loss treatment can be emotional, if approached with love, understanding, and support, hearing aids can result in a positive and beneficial experience for everyone involved. The best part? Treating hearing loss can only lead to a better, more fulfilling life.

Find the time today to evaluate if you have hearing loss then resolve to investigate treatment options as soon as possible. There's no reason to put off the happier life you and your loved ones deserve.



For more information on hearing loss visit [www.TruHearing.com](http://www.TruHearing.com)

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