

# THE IMPACT OF HEARING LOSS ON COMMUNICATIONS

Hearing loss is the decreased ability to hear. People can gradually lose hearing as they age due to several factors, including genetics, exposure to noise throughout an individual's lifetime, infections, injuries, and certain medications. Hearing loss can range from mild to severe.

Before discussing how to communicate with individuals experiencing hearing loss, it is important to first understand the types of communication (Merriam Webster, 2015).

## Types of Communication

- ♦ Verbal Communication
  - Spoken words
- ♦ Nonverbal Communication
  - Eye contact
  - Body language
  - Tone of voice
  - Facial expressions
- ♦ Written Communication
  - Pen and paper
  - Pamphlets
  - Diagrams
  - Pictures

## Tips for effective communication with people experiencing hearing loss (ASHA, 2015):

- ♦ Go somewhere quiet with minimal distractions, turning off music or TVs.
- ♦ Talk somewhere that is well lit, especially around your face and mouth. This will allow others to watch your body language, and even read your lips.
- ♦ Speak slowly and clearly.
- ♦ Try to lower your tone of voice if you have a higher-pitched voice. Lower pitches are easier to hear and understand, especially if someone has a hearing device.
- ♦ Allow the other person to know when you are changing subjects by pausing or prompting them on the new topic.
- ♦ Be aware of your body language. Studies have found that sitting face to face with someone and keeping eye contact is one of the best ways to effectively communicate.
- ♦ If someone does not understand what you are saying and you have repeated it several times, try to describe it in a different way.
- ♦ Keep your voice at a normal volume; do not shout or yell.
- ♦ Do not interrupt; allow the other person to speak and listen carefully.
- ♦ When giving instructions, ask the individual to repeat things back to you, as well as requesting them to summarize what they were told. If they are unable to repeat it back, take another approach, such as writing out directions or demonstrating it for them.
- ♦ If the individual is unable to follow the conversation or is having trouble participating, try a different form of communicating, like thumbs up or down, or showing them pictures of what you are asking.



- ♦ If you or the other individual is becoming frustrated because they cannot express themselves, take a deep breath, giving both of you a moment in silence to help refocus.
- ♦ Most importantly, always be respectful, address the individual even if they cannot express themselves, and do not converse as if they are not there.

**Disclaimer:**

*Medline does not practice medicine, and no information presented on this website is medical advice or intended as a substitute for the advice of a physician. All information on this website concerning medical conditions is from publicly available sources.*

## REFERENCES

1. Giles, H., Hajek, C., Stoitsova, T., & Choi, C. (2010). Intergenerational Communication Satisfaction and Age Boundaries in Bulgaria and the United States. *Journal Of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 25(2), 133-147. doi:10.1007/s10823-010-9114-x
2. Family Practice Management (2006). Improving Communication With Older Patients: Tips From the Literature. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2006/0900/p73.html#>
3. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2015). Communicating Better With Older People Retrieved. June 10, 2015, from <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/Communicating-Better-With-Older-People/>
4. Help Guide (2015). Effective Communication. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/effective-communication.htm>
5. Merriam Webster (n.d.). Communications. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>
6. Mayo Clinic. (2015). Mayo Clinic-Diseases Retrieved June 15, 2015, from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/>