

Hearing Loss Conversation Kit



About 20 percent of Americans, or 48 million people, report some degree of hearing loss,¹ but it can still be difficult to start the conversation with a loved one about recognizing and treating it.



If you are one of the 44 million family caregivers in America, you are the backbone of the long-term care system and in a unique position to recognize the issue and also provide continuity and support through the hearing-health process.

The benefits of discussing hearing loss and then taking action far outweigh any temporary discomfort of a conversation. Follow this guide to discover the signs of hearing loss to watch for, why it is so important to treat hearing loss and how to make an action plan that works for everyone.

¹ http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/one_in_five_americans_has_hearing_loss



Signs of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss doesn't always present itself in ways you'd expect—especially if someone has been dealing with the effects for a while and is good at hiding the symptoms. Watch for changes in behavior in the following situations:



▶ **Telephone Calls**—Many of the tactics people use to cope with their hearing loss, such as reading lips, interpreting facial cues, gauging responses from others in a group, etc., are absent on the telephone. If you find yourself having frustrating phone conversations, the problem may be hearing loss and not the connection.



▶ **Loud Gatherings**—For someone dealing with hearing loss, parties or restaurants can exacerbate the problem as they struggle to distinguish conversations out of a multitude of sounds. Everything becomes "just noise" instead of a pleasant social activity.



▶ **Personality**—When someone who is usually talkative, engaged and quick-witted becomes withdrawn and unresponsive, or their responses don't match the conversation, it's normal to be concerned. Hearing loss may be the root of the issue.



▶ **Volume**—One of the first ways people compensate for their hearing loss is turning up the volume on the TV, radio, telephone and even their own voice. If it reaches the point where the volume is uncomfortable for others, it may be time to address the underlying problem.



▶ **Communication Style**—People with hearing loss may start to feel more comfortable with written versions of communication like notes, emails and texts. Avoiding face-to-face conversations or telephone calls could be caused by something other than a sudden interest in technology or the written word.

Benefits of Treating Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can be such a gradual process that sometimes it isn't treated until it has affected more than just the ears. Treating hearing loss is linked to improvement in multiple areas that can increase the quality of life.

- ▶ Cognitive Function—Treating hearing loss may offer a simple way to prevent or slow the development of dementia by keeping adults with hearing loss engaged in conversation and communication.²
- ▶ Personality and Mental Health—In a National Council on Aging study of 2,304 people with hearing loss, those who didn't treat their hearing loss were 50 percent more likely to suffer from sadness or depression than people who did. Additionally, people who treated it were much more likely to participate in social activities regularly.³
- ▶ Staying Social—Hearing loss can lead to social isolation in older adults, and studies have demonstrated associations between poor social networks and dementia.⁴ People who treat their hearing loss are more likely to stay socially active and mentally sharp.
- ▶ Balance—Hearing loss was independently associated with self-reported falls over the preceding 12 months.⁵ Treating hearing loss provides environmental awareness and frees cognitive resources that can be used for balance and posture.

How To Talk About Hearing Loss

While vision impairment and glasses carry little social stigma, conversations about hearing loss can still be emotional. For some, hearing loss is seen as a reminder of aging and the changes that come with it, or as another reason they may lose independence. All conversations about hearing loss should start with an understanding of and sensitivity to the feelings of the person affected. This is a perfect opportunity to manage the negative perceptions related to hearing loss and focus on the positive effects of treatment.

Start with phrases like:

- ▶ I value our relationship and want to be able to communicate with you.
- ▶ I think our communication could improve if we tried treating your hearing.
- ▶ You may enjoy spending time with friends again if you can feel confident during conversations.

Give examples of how the hearing loss has affected your relationship or caused unnecessary misunderstandings or isolation. Take the opportunity to discuss how treating hearing loss will not only benefit the person affected but also everyone in their life.

The best way to improve the outcomes for everyone is to talk openly and honestly about effects and treatment.

² Z. Jason Qian, Kapil Wattamwar, Francesco F. Caruana, Jenna Otter, Matthew J. Leskowitz, Barbara Siedlecki, Jaclyn B. Spitzer, Anil K. Lalwani. Hearing Aid Use is Associated with Better Mini-Mental State Exam Performance. *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 2016

³ Frank R. Lin, E. Jeffrey Metter, Richard J. O'Brien, Susan M. Resnick, Alan B. Zonderman, Luigi Ferrucci. Hearing Loss and Incident Dementia. *Archives of Neurology*, 2011

⁴ Weinstein BE, Ventri IM. Hearing impairment and social isolation in the elderly. *J Speech Hear Res* 1982

⁵ Lin FR, Ferrucci L. Hearing loss and falls among older adults in the United States. *Arch Intern Med* (2012)



Steps To Take and Available Resources

The good news is hearing loss can be comparatively easy to treat and there are many solutions to try. The best outcome may include a combination of treatments and technologies.

- ▶ Visit a Doctor—The first step should be to visit a doctor, audiologist or hearing-instrument specialist who can examine the underlying cause and the degree of hearing loss.
 - » Be prepared with examples of symptoms.
 - » Remember to bring the patient's insurance information.
 - » Be open and honest during the appointment and share as much as you can about your hearing loss. The more the provider learns, the better chance they have of providing the right solution.
- ▶ Explore Hearing Aid Options—The cost and technology vary widely and the right fit is essential for each person.
 - » Most hearing aids fall into one of three categories:

- i. Behind the ear—The body of the device is placed behind the ear with a connected earpiece that is placed in the ear canal. The larger size makes them easier to handle and the larger speaker can be powerful.
- ii. Receiver in canal—Similar to a behind-the-ear device but smaller. Their size can make them more discreet and comfortable.
- iii. In the ear—These can fit anywhere from partially to completely in the ear canal, are molded to fit and are the least visible option.

- » Be sure to follow the instructions of your provider and understand that it may take some time to become comfortable using hearing aids. Hearing aids are amazing and complex devices, so plan for follow-up adjustment appointments for the best results.
- » Hearing aids can be expensive, but financial aid may be available through Medicaid, veterans programs or even through hearing aid manufacturers.
- » The Food and Drug Administration is considering over-the-counter hearing aid options for people with mild to moderate hearing loss. This may be an interesting development for the future.

► Assistive Technology

- » Captioned telephone service—Caption telephones provide captions of what people say so the person with hearing loss can read along. As part of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the phones and service are available for free to everyone with hearing loss who can't use the phone effectively without captions. Even people who successfully use hearing aids may still have difficulty using the phone.
- » Bluetooth—This wireless technology is included in many hearing aids, telephones and headsets. With Bluetooth and compatible accessories, audio from a TV, cellphone or even microphones can be sent directly to a hearing aid for the best listening experience.
- » Neckloop—These accessories are designed to plug into a headphone jack and send the audio signal directly to a hearing aid.

» Assistive Listening Devices—Hearing assistive technology such as audio loops (or hearing loops), FM, and infrared systems are like binoculars for the ears and work with or without hearing aids. These devices can help you hear in situations where acoustics are poor, background noise is bothersome, or there is a long distance from the speaker.

- » Telecoil—The telecoil is a small copper wire located inside the hearing aid or cochlear implant. It functions as a wireless antenna that links into a sound system and delivers customized sound to the listener.
- » Alerting Devices—Visual and tactile devices are available that provide alerts for the doorbell, smoke alarm, alarm clock, and other devices that produce a sound that is difficult to hear.

► Consumer Information and Support—

The Hearing Loss Association of America is a national organization dedicated to providing assistance and resources for people with hearing loss and their families. They have local chapters, a magazine and decades of experience in helping people with hearing loss. Learn more at hearingloss.org.

Talking about and treating hearing loss can be a positive experience for everyone, and there's no reason to wait. Start the conversation today!



The Hearing Loss Conversation Kit was created by CaptionCall in partnership with the Hearing Loss Association of America and the National Alliance for Caregiving.

Please visit www.captioncall.com/conversation-kit/ for more information and to download an electronic version.

Would you like to request copies of the Conversation Kit for your organization?
Please email ccmarketing@captioncall.com.

The mission of HLAA is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

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The National Alliance for Caregiving is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations focusing on advancing family caregiving through research, innovation, and advocacy. The Alliance supports a network of more than 80 state and local caregiving coalitions and serves as Secretariat for the International Alliance of Carer Organizations (IACO). Learn more at www.caregiving.org.



CaptionCall is the world's best captioning telephone designed to help people with hearing loss use the phone to stay socially connected with loved ones, conduct important business and, best of all, maintain confident communications for a longer, happier, healthier life.