



AMERICAN  
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-  
HEARING  
ASSOCIATION

**AUDIOLOGY**

Information Series

# Support for Caregivers and Families of People With Hearing Loss

Untreated hearing loss can lead to isolation, confusion, embarrassment, and depression. Sometimes people are not aware of their hearing loss. They may blame you for mumbling or talking too softly. Or they may withdraw from difficult social activities. Individuals who are caring for someone with a hearing loss can help their loved one seek help. Your involvement can provide the emotional support to begin the steps to better hearing. Helping your loved one treat their hearing loss will improve their quality of life.

## How do I get them started?

Start by having your loved one request a physician referral for a hearing evaluation with a certified audiologist. This medical referral will allow for Medicare coverage of the hearing test if they have Medicare.

Audiologists are health care professionals who provide patient-centered care in the prevention, identification, diagnosis, and evidence-based treatment of hearing, balance, and other auditory disorders for people of all ages. If you need help locating an audiologist, you can find a professional near you by searching the ASHA website for “ProFind.”

## What can I expect at the first appointment?

It is helpful for you to attend the hearing test and other audiology appointments.

### Preparing for the appointment

Before the first appointment, have a talk with your loved one. They should be prepared to share information about daily life during the audiology appointment. Answers to the following questions are useful for the audiologist to know.

#### Describe your lifestyle.

- Working or retired
- Living alone or with spouse in own home
- Living in a community residence
- Active or sedentary

#### When is it the most difficult to communicate?

- On the phone
- In group gatherings
- Watching TV
- Talking to small children
- At the store

#### What is the medical history?

- List all significant medical events and diagnoses, including diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, ringing in the ears, imbalance, low vision, trouble moving fingers, and the loss of feeling in the finger tips.
- List all medications, including all prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter medications. Be sure to have information about dosages.
- Ask your loved one if there is ringing in the ear or if there are balance issues. People with hearing loss often report ringing in the ear (tinnitus) and are at higher risk for falls.

#### During the appointment

Share all of the information that you discussed before the appointment. Let your loved one talk about their day-to-day life. Also share your concerns if your loved one seems confused, unsteady, or withdrawn from social activities. Be prepared. Your loved one may feel saddened by their diagnosis of hearing loss.

#### Follow-up from the appointment

The audiologist will develop a hearing rehabilitation plan. This may include hearing aids and hearing assistive technology. Hearing aids are electronic devices that collect sound, amplify it, and direct the amplified sound into the ear. Hearing aids are regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to pass very specific quality standards. They are custom-made to fit your loved one's hearing loss and listening needs. The hearing rehabilitation plan will include education for you and your loved one with how to use, clean, and care for the hearing aid.

## Selecting a hearing aid

There are different costs for different hearing aids. A higher cost does not mean that the hearing aid is the best for your loved one. The audiologist will recommend a few hearing aids that are best for your loved one. You can pick which one best fits the hearing loss and the budget. Please note that there are opportunities to purchase hearing aids online as well. Buying online may seem convenient, less expensive, and private. There are some things you should know before you buy.

- Purchasing directly online may not meet your loved one's hearing needs.
- The programming of hearing aids uses specialized computer programs. Online hearing aids may not be able to be modified by programming.

## At the hearing aid fittings

There can be many appointments when you are being fit for a hearing aid. The hearing aid will not cure a hearing loss. It is important to talk at the first fitting appointment about what you hope to gain with the hearing aid. The audiologist will program the hearing aid to customize the way the device performs for individuals. This way, it can help your loved ones only in those areas that need the support. Audiologists continue working with individuals after the first hearing aid fitting. These follow-up appointments are important to fine-tune the programming. This makes it work even better over time.

## What about over-the-counter listening devices?

Over-the-counter listening devices are also known as Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPS). PSAPS are not hearing aids but have these same parts:

- A microphone to pick up sound
- An amplifier to make sounds louder
- A receiver (speaker) to deliver the amplified sound into the ear
- Small batteries to power the device

It is important to know that the FDA does not regulate PSAPS. This means that there can be a difference in the quality of the PSAPS. What you buy may not be useful for your loved one. The products are not customized to your loved one's needs. In addition, there is little education for the use, care, and cleaning of the PSAPS.



For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, scan with your mobile device.

## What are other ways that I can help?

Use good listening skills. Remind your loved one to do these things:

- Wear the hearing aids and keep them clean. Check the batteries.
- Get close to the speaker. Move up toward the front in a lecture hall or house of worship.
- Be in the same room when you talk with others.
- Take listening breaks. Feeling tired can mix up conversations.
- Ask the person speaking to speak more slowly.
- Ask the person speaking to face you when speaking. Look at the speaker's face.
- Let the person speaking know when you are having trouble hearing or understanding.

## Here are some simple things you can do to improve conversation and understanding:

- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Don't shout.
- Get your loved one's attention before beginning a conversation—a tap on the shoulder or a visual cue like pointing helps.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth and, if relevant, trim facial hair because facial cues (including lip movements) help the person with hearing loss “see” what they don't hear.
- Move away from noise, and choose a quiet place for conversation.
- Pick quiet restaurants or off times to dine out.

For more information about hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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