

Coping with hearing loss

Noisy family lunches or lively pub catch-ups can be tricky to navigate if you're hard of hearing. Struggling to follow social chatter can leave many people feeling isolated and even lead to cognitive decline. Whether this sounds like you or someone you care about, understanding hearing loss and taking steps to manage it can make a massive difference.

Struggling to hear can lead to social isolation and even cognitive decline. Here's how to handle it...

Here, Elizabeth Kingsmith, clinical audiologist at Pindrop Hearing (pindropearing.co.uk), reveals all about the different types of hearing loss and the coping strategies that can help.

Understand the causes

Elizabeth explains, 'The two main types of hearing loss are sensorineural and conductive hearing losses. Sensorineural hearing loss is

caused by damage to the hair cells in the cochlea. The hair cells are responsible for turning the physical vibration of the sound into an electrical impulse, which is sent to the brain. This is the most common type we see in age-related hearing loss, noise damage and sometimes earlier in life – for example, hereditary hearing loss or other causes. Sensorineural hearing loss is generally a permanent hearing loss for which the only treatment is hearing aids.

'Conductive hearing losses, on the other hand, can be temporary. This type of hearing loss is caused by inefficiencies in the middle ear – for example, the eardrum or the ossicles are not passing the sound vibration to the cochlea properly. Sometimes it will resolve on its own, it may require surgical intervention or may be permanent.

'To diagnose a hearing loss and distinguish between the two types, your audiologist

will test the hearing first with headphones, and then with a "bone conductor", which vibrates to send the sound through the bone and directly to the cochlea.'

Appreciate your 'effort'

When it comes to recognising there's a problem, Elizabeth advises you pay attention to how much 'listening effort' you're putting into your interactions.

She explains, 'Some of the biggest indicators are feeling like people are mumbling or speaking too quickly. This is because, especially with age-related hearing loss, it usually comes on very gradually so people don't notice a sudden change in the hearing, they start to miss bits of each word which can make speech sound less distinct.

'As the hearing deteriorates, people develop coping mechanisms to compensate for the hearing loss, but this requires extra concentration

or "effort" and more time to think about what is being said.

'Another big clue is struggling in background noise. Usually, in quiet situations, people can "fill in the gaps" if the speaker is not too far away or facing them. But in noisier environments, even for someone with normal hearing, it requires much more cognitive processing to filter out the background noise.

'Add to this a hearing loss and the amount of effort to follow the conversation goes up massively.

'At some point the person might decide it is too hard to keep up and stop trying.'

This withdrawal can then lead to poor mental health and social isolation.

Get it checked

Elizabeth says, 'If you or your family have concerns about your hearing, it is important to have the hearing checked. Sometimes it is a straightforward case of

removing some earwax, but if there is a hearing loss, it is important to be aware of it so that you can make an informed decision about treatment.

'Your audiologist will be able to advise on whether a referral to ENT is necessary, for example, in the case of conductive hearing losses.'

If hearing aids are deemed the best or only solution, take heart that modern versions can be life-changing for many people.

There are also some surprisingly simple listening strategies to try, too. For example, rephrasing can be more effective than repeating. Hearing loss often means we mishear the same particular sounds. When someone repeats themselves and you still can't make out what they're saying, ask them to rephrase it instead.

If you're in a noisy environment, standing with your back to a wall can limit the amount of background noise you hear. Soft furnishings, carpets and curtains can all help to minimise background noise too, whereas more industrial interiors can create echoes and amplify it.

Read it

Sara Cox and her best friend of over 30 years Clare Hamilton have launched a new podcast, *The Teen Commandments*, which is part comedy, part survival guide. With five teens between them, each week they attempt to write the unwritten commandments of teenagedom – from the sacred 'thou shall leave wet towels on the floor' to the universally observed 'thou shall constantly wear headphones'. As they compare notes, swap parenting fails and decode the



ever-changing teen universe, no topic is off limits. Available on all major podcast platforms.

Our Health SOS

I lived a healthy life but had two heart attacks in the space of two years. What was wrong with me?

'CALL AN AMBULANCE!'

As I got into bed, I leant over and switched off the light. But as I settled, I noticed my bedsheets were drenched in sweat.

I started struggling to breathe, and felt shooting pains down my left arm and up into my neck and jaw.

But, after about 20 minutes, the episode passed, and I drifted off to sleep.

Next morning, I went to work.

I thought, *Maybe I'm just stressed or tired.*

But in the days that followed, I felt out of breath.

So, on a drive home from a training course I ran, I took a detour to hospital.

There, I explained my symptoms to a nurse.

She looked concerned. 'Please sit over here,' she said. 'I'll get a doctor to see you.'

Minutes later, a doctor appeared.

'We need to take you to A&E,' he said, gesturing to a wheelchair.

I laughed, but he didn't. Blood tests, scans and an ECG were carried out.

Then, a consultant told me, 'You've had a SCAD heart attack.'

I felt stunned.

'Surely there's been a mistake?' I said.

I didn't drink, smoke or

take drugs. I didn't eat meat, and I worked out regularly.

Family and my partner visited me in the coronary care unit, where doctors monitored me, but were unable to determine the cause of my SCAD (spontaneous coronary artery dissection) heart attack.

I felt too weak to lift a cup of coffee or walk unaided.

After 10 days, I returned home.

But in the months that followed, I underwent cardiac rehabilitation and therapy. As time went on, I felt I was slowly getting back on track.

Then one night, an all-too-familiar feeling returned.

'Call an ambulance!' I

shouted to my partner.

At hospital, tests confirmed I'd suffered another SCAD heart attack.

What felt most frightening was how unpredictable the attacks were.

But, in time, I decided I wasn't going to let SCAD rule my life. I wanted to take back control.

So, I signed up for the London Marathon. I'll be running this month to raise money for Beat SCAD UK.

It's given me something positive to focus on, and I can't wait to cross that finish line!

● To donate to Aniela's fundraiser, visit justgiving.com and search 'Aniela Zylinski'

Spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD)

● **What is it?** SCAD is a heart condition where a bruise or tear develops in the wall of a coronary artery, which can result in a heart attack and injury to the heart muscle. It affects people with few or none of the normal risk factors for heart disease.

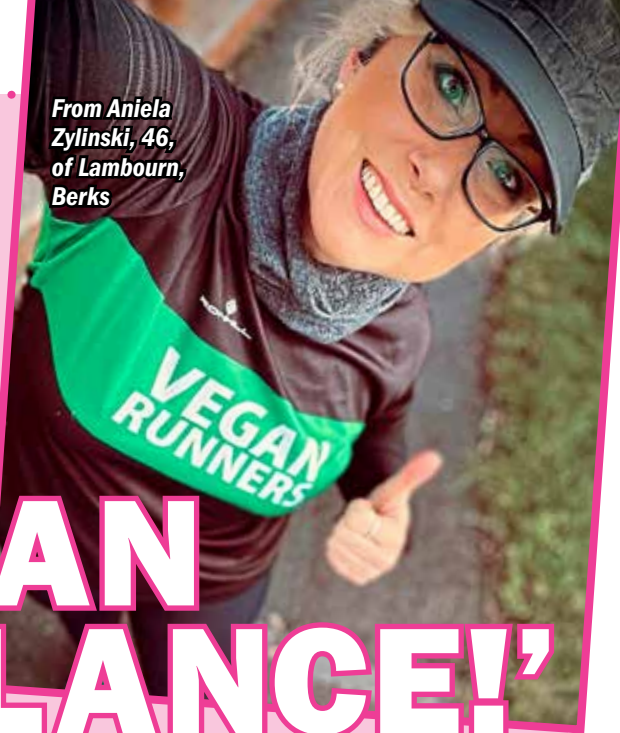
● **What are the symptoms?** During a SCAD episode you may experience pain, pressure, tightness or heaviness in the

chest, rapid heartbeat, excessive sweating, extreme exhaustion, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, fainting or headaches.

● **What's the treatment?** SCAD patients can be treated with medication, or they may need interventions such as stents or bypass surgery.

● **Where can I find out more?** Visit beatscad.org.uk

From Aniela Zylinski, 46, of Lambourn, Berks



By Danielle Lett

Shop Spy

Superdrug Allergy Eye Drops provide relief for irritated, itchy eyes caused by hay fever, dust, pollution, air conditioning or bright lights. The formula includes natural plant extracts of witch hazel and calendula, known for their soothing properties. Suitable for use with waterproof eye make-up and contact lenses. Superdrug, £3.99.

