



Understanding
HEARING LOSS

INTRODUCTION

Why is Everyone Around Me Mumbling?!

For most of our lives, hearing is a sensory experience that comes to us naturally and effortlessly. The alarm clock startles us awake in the morning. The beep of the washing machine is our cue to transfer our clothes to the dryer. The radio accompanies us on our drive home from work. We have vibrant conversations with family members at restaurants. We experience simple joys like hearing the doorbell ring with a surprise visit from a friend.

Hearing loss is disorienting because everyday experiences become blurred as our ears struggle to decipher the sounds around us. Words begin to sound like this. The crispness of the world around us becomes increasingly muted and subdued.

At the crux of hearing loss is often a fear of losing the ability to communicate with ease. As we strain our ears to listen to the voices of those around us, our communication with others can slow down (even as our minds remain as active as ever). With hearing loss vocabulary includes a lot more “huh’s” and “what did you say’s” than it did before. It starts to feel like the people around you have forgotten the art of enunciation. It becomes harder to keep track of conversations in crowded places. The television set sounds softer; the volume must go up higher, right??

Hearing loss can make everyday experiences feel like a struggle. When we have to strain our ears just to hear and understand, every part of our day becomes a little more challenging. We realize just how often we use our ears. We even start to miss the soft sounds we had become so accustomed to, like the neighbor’s windchimes, and the cat’s meow to be let in.

However, though hearing loss can feel disorienting, it doesn’t have to be disorienting. When we educate ourselves about hearing loss, we can make thoughtful, informed decisions about restoring our hearing.

This e-book offers some of the information you and your loved ones need in order to better understand and cope with hearing loss.

1

THE BASICS *of* HEARING LOSS

provides context about hearing loss: its scope, causes, and diagnosis.

2

LIVING *with* HEARING LOSS

discusses some of the challenges that accompany hearing loss and offers ways to cope.

3

DEVELOPMENTS *in the* FIELD OF HEARING LOSS

discusses advancements in hearing technology, including the development and function of hearing aids and Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs). This chapter also discusses the legal developments in the field of hearing loss.

4

RESOURCES *for* HEARING LOSS

we provide resources for those of you who have a loved one with hearing loss and are looking for ways to support them.

We hope this e-book will help you feel more confident about your knowledge of hearing loss. And we hope this knowledge will help you continue to make informed decisions about improving your hearing!

CHAPTER ONE

The Basics of Hearing Loss

Coping with hearing loss starts with learning about hearing loss. Learning more about a condition that affects you can sometimes feel overwhelming. The increase in access to scientific research makes it easy for us to feel like the information available is endless. And, sometimes we aren't sure which questions we should even be asking about hearing loss. However, learning about hearing loss can also be empowering because we gain the tools to take control of our condition.

THE PREVALENCE OF HEARING LOSS

Though hearing loss can feel like an isolating experience, hearing loss is actually very common. In fact, age-related hearing loss (presbycusis) occurs gradually in almost all of us as we age. Approximately 1 in 3 people in the United States between the ages of 65 and 74 have hearing loss. Nearly half of those older than 75 experience difficulty hearing.¹ Among the age group of 20-69, men are almost twice as likely as women to experience hearing loss.²

Almost 50 million Americans have hearing loss in at least one ear. And even more surprisingly, only a small fraction of people address their hearing loss. In fact, approximately 6 out of every 10 people with moderate to severe hearing loss have not taken sufficient steps to address their hearing loss.^{3,4}

The medical term for age-related hearing loss is presbycusis. Presbycusis can be mild or substantial in severity. Regardless of its degree of severity, presbycusis can affect one's communication abilities and can lead to psychological effects like depression or feelings of isolation. However, if identified early, presbycusis is highly manageable. And if treated properly, one's quality of life is not substantially changed with the diagnosis.

1 <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-hearing>

2 <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-hearing>

3 <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1106004>

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK233884/>

SYMPTOMS OF HEARING LOSS

Age-related hearing loss can sometimes be difficult to self-identify. Since most people experience age-related hearing loss gradually, it can be hard to tell when your hearing abilities start to fade, since it is often a slow process. There typically is not a sudden shift from being able to hear clearly and no longer being able to hear. Furthermore, age-related hearing loss typically occurs in both ears simultaneously. Since the ability to hear typically does not fade in one ear faster than the other, it can be challenging to use your own ears as a metric to determine when your hearing starts weakening.

Though it can be challenging to self-identify hearing loss, there are some early tell-tale signs of hearing loss. Some of these signs include⁵:

- *Having difficulty understanding words, especially when in crowded environments like family gatherings or at restaurants*
- *Asking the people around you to repeat themselves more frequently than before*
- *Having trouble hearing the doorbell or phone when it rings*
- *Hearing a buzzing or ringing sound in your ears*
- *Having to turn up the volume on your television or radio when others in the room feel that it is too loud*
- *Feeling more isolated and withdrawn from conversations because you're having trouble keeping up with what is being said*

Experiencing any of these issues means it's time to get your hearing tested. There are lots of options for where to go to get your hearing tested. You can always go to your primary care physician, or you can have your hearing tested for free at a Lucid Hearing Center by scheduling an appointment here.

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<http://lucidhearing.com/frequently-asked-questions/>



DISCOVERING HEARING LOSS

The diagnostic process for hearing loss is usually relatively straightforward. If you decide to undergo a hearing evaluation by a Lucid certified hearing specialist to determine the health of your hearing. You will be seated in an enclosed hearing booth where different tones and words will be given for you to decipher. If the hearing specialist determines that there is a deficiency, they will recommend the best options for you to hear clearly. The process is non-invasive and relatively quick.

If there's one thing to know about the diagnostic process for hearing loss it is this: diagnosing hearing loss early has immense benefits. A 2014 study on the relationship between hearing loss and dementia showed that those over 65 with hearing loss have an increased rate of developing dementia than their non-hearing impaired counterparts. The implication of this study is that hearing loss is at least correlated with cognitive dysfunction, and can be a marker for identifying cognitive dysfunction like dementia in those 65 years of age and older.⁶

There are several explanations for why hearing and thinking skills appear to be connected. First, hearing loss can have effects on people's social lives, leading to greater social isolation which is linked to cognitive impairment. In addition, since hearing loss causes the brain to work overtime processing the signals from the ears, it is possible that the brain has less energy to expend on other cognitive functions.⁷ Diagnosing hearing loss early is important because it allows you to give support to the ears early in the process, ideally avoiding social isolation or the cognitive impairment that can follow.

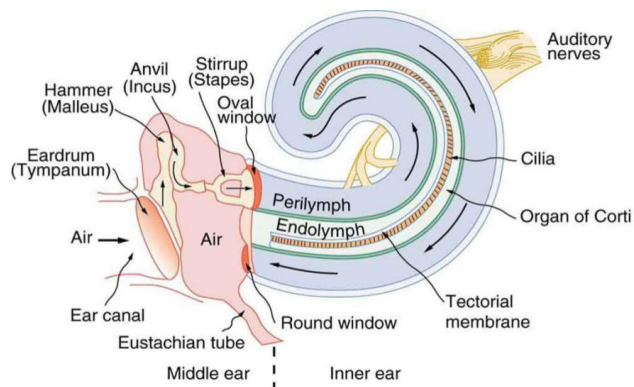
6 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4024067/>

7 <http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/hearing-loss-may-be-linked-to-mental-decline-201301225824>

CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS

There are many different possible causes of age-related hearing loss. Like our vision, our hearing begins to change as we age. One of the most common causes of hearing loss is the constant overexposure to loud noises. Noise-induced hearing loss can affect all ages and is a result of exposure to loud noises. When our ears are exposed to loud noises over a long period of time, the sensory hair cells in our ears become damaged. These hairs, called cilia, are located within the cochlea (inner ear) and do not grow back. Fewer hairs means a diminished ability to hear. In Figure 1.1., you can see the cilia located within the inner ear. The cilia are destroyed when they are over-exposed to loud noises, often causing hearing loss.

FIGURE 1.1: ILLUSTRATION OF THE INNER EAR ⁸



Other possible causes of hearing loss include changes to parts of our ears as we age, existing medical conditions that cause hearing loss, and changes to nerve pathways from the ears to the brain. Though the causes of hearing loss can be diverse, the impact is usually similar: a diminished ability to hear.

CHAPTER TWO

Living with Hearing Loss

Having trouble hearing can affect many aspects of your life, including your work, your interpersonal relationships and your hobbies. However, hearing loss does not have to result in major changes to your routine. You have the power to cope with hearing loss. In this chapter, we outline the challenges that can accompany hearing loss. Understanding these challenges is helpful for knowing what to expect. We end the chapter with a discussion of ways to cope with hearing loss.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH HEARING LOSS

As one of the five senses, the ability to hear allows us to make sense of our world. Hearing is one of the primary tools we use to communicate with others, sense danger, experience calmness, and respond to cues. When our ability to hear begins to diminish, we might notice some difficulty in navigating our world.

The four main areas of your life that might be affected by hearing loss are: your work life, your home life, your enjoyment of leisure activities, and your participation in social activities. The challenges that accompany hearing loss are greatly diminished or even eliminated with the use of hearing aids. However, in this section, we'll describe some of the challenges you might notice when your hearing begins to weaken, before you start using hearing aids.



If you work, your work life might change depending on your occupation and day-to-day routine. Most workplaces require spending some time on the phone. You might notice that you are having a harder time participating in phone conversations because it is harder to hear what the person on the other end is saying. In addition, staff

meetings can become a challenge, especially if multiple people are speaking at once. It can become hard to decipher what individual people are saying, and separate their words out from any background noises that might be present. If you're having trouble hearing at work, there are multiple ways to deal with it, along with beginning to use hearing aids.

One way to deal with hearing loss at work is to use email when possible. Communicating via writing can reduce misunderstandings, and can often be more efficient! Another way to deal with hearing loss at work is to sit in an area where there isn't much background noise. Background noise makes it more difficult to decipher the sounds of people speaking, so avoiding background noises as much as possible is helpful. When you're having a one-on-one conversation with someone, it can be helpful to watch their lips to help you understand what they are saying. If you don't understand something, it's absolutely okay to ask them for clarification!

At home, you might notice that you're having trouble hearing some of the things that you once relied on for your daily routine. You might notice that you're having a hard time hearing your alarm in the morning or hearing the doorbell when it rings. Maybe your food keeps burning because you aren't able to hear the oven timer.

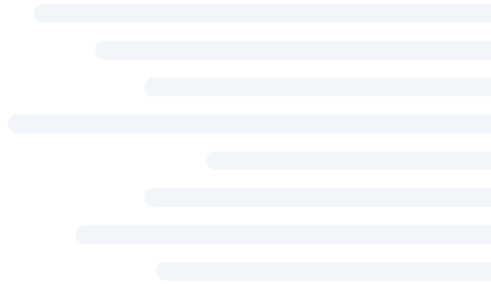
It can be frustrating when the things that used to soothe you become stressful because you're having to strain your ears to hear.

However, besides these things, the main way hearing loss will affect you at home is by changing the way you communicate with the people you live with. Communication in one's home is typically casual and effortless in many ways. If you have children or grandchildren, you might be used to having conversations across the house. These conversations become more difficult with hearing loss because it can become challenging to hear and understand people who aren't directly across from you. The effortless dinnertime conversations you used to have might become more difficult as you strain your ears to pick up every word.

In the comfort of your home, you can make accommodations that help you hear with ease. Along with the use of a hearing aid, you can turn up the volume on things like your alarm, or you can request that people call you (with your phone on vibrate) if they notice you're taking a while to answer the doorbell. With the people around you, you can make requests that they speak louder and more clearly. Making eye contact with the people around you can also help you understand.

Hearing loss may also affect some of your leisure activities. Many hobbies involve the use of our ears. Hearing loss might affect your enjoyment of activities like watching TV and movies, listening to music, tuning into the radio, or attending concerts or plays. One telltale sign of hearing loss is when you or your loved ones notice that the volume on the television or radio is turned up to a volume that is uncomfortable for them, but still too soft for you. Leisure activities help calm us down and feel relaxed. It can be frustrating when the things that used to soothe you become stressful because you're having to strain your ears to hear.

However, having hearing loss doesn't mean you have to abandon your leisure activities. Along with the use of hearing aids, which will bring clarity and volume back to the sounds you love, there are other options for continuing to enjoy your leisure activities while coping with hearing loss. For example, sitting closer to the stage at concerts or plays can help you enjoy the visual aspect of these experiences, along with making it easier for you to hear. In addition, you can turn the subtitles on when watching your favorite sounds or movies. This simple move will ensure that you won't miss a single punchline or brilliant line of dialogue.



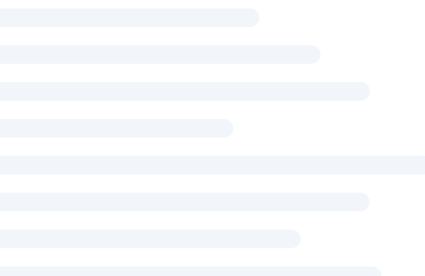
Finally, hearing loss can affect participation in social activities. Background noises combined with the challenge of disentangling the voices of different people can make deciphering sentences difficult. Gatherings of family and friends can sound like an unorganized cacophony of noises, making participating in conversations difficult. In restaurants, the clamor of dishes and utensils can make it difficult to hear what even the person next to you is saying.

It is easy to begin feeling self-conscious about having difficulty hearing in social situations; however, having difficulty hearing does not need to stop you from participating in social activities. Activities where there are fewer distracting noises are ideal.

Organized activities, such as board games, can be a great way to connect and have fun with others without dealing with too many overlapping noises. Games like Scrabble® are especially good, since the focus of the game is not on speaking! One way to handle more crowded social situations is to navigate them with a partner. A friend or family member who is familiar with your hearing loss can engage in conversations alongside you, so they can re-state anything that you miss! Your hearing loss shouldn't keep you from being around the people you love, and doing the things you're doing. It is very possible to maintain a vibrant social life with hearing loss.

EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES *Associated with Hearing Loss*

Though hearing loss is a physiological issue, it has emotional implications. The main emotional challenge typically associated with hearing loss are feelings of isolation. Hearing loss can be an isolating experience because it affects the way one communicates with others. Feelings of embarrassment, shame, and frustration are not uncommon with hearing loss. Depression and anxiety are also common mental health conditions that are associated with hearing loss.⁹



Addressing your hearing loss just means you want to participate more fully in life and not miss things.

A 2012 study on the impact of hearing loss on the quality of life of elderly adults found that hearing loss is the cause of reduced communicative relationships as well as reduced social and emotional interactions. These reductions in relationships and interactions¹⁰ can lead to “loneliness, isolation, and decline in social activities, as well as communication disorders and dissatisfaction with family life.”¹¹ Reduced self-esteem is another emotional issue associated with untreated hearing loss.

Sometimes, people experiencing hearing loss are hesitant to see a medical professional for their hearing loss or to seek ways to improve their hearing. This is exacerbated by the fact that hearing loss occurs gradually, so there is never one particular moment that indicates that one should seek professional attention for their hearing loss.

The emotional challenges associated with hearing loss increase when people avoid seeking support for their hearing loss. These emotional challenges can be mitigated when hearing loss is properly addressed. As Tom, a Vietnam War veteran with hearing loss, likes to say: “Addressing hearing loss isn’t about being an old person, and it shouldn’t be about vanity. Addressing your hearing loss just means you want to participate more fully in life and not miss things.” Hearing loss can prevent a person from participating fully in life leading to deleterious emotional harms, but it doesn’t have to. Hearing loss can be addressed, and when it is, many of the emotional consequences subside.

COPING WITH HEARING LOSS

Though there are both practical and emotional challenges associated with hearing loss, coping with hearing loss is very possible. The very first step in coping with hearing loss is acknowledging that you have hearing loss. Sometimes, this first step can be the hardest because it involves coming to terms with a change in the way you are used to living your life. However, when we recognize that hearing loss is a part of life that many people go through as they age, then we can begin to see hearing loss as a natural process.

10 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3393360/>

11 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3393360/>



Reaching out to your family and friends for support can also help you come to terms with your hearing loss. Hearing loss can feel like an alienating experience, but knowing that you have a support system around you can help mitigate some of the emotional challenges associated with hearing loss.

In addition, when the people around you understand that you have hearing loss and that you are taking steps to improve your hearing, they will often step up to support you in situations that might be difficult. For example, they might stand by your side in crowded gatherings to help you understand what is said. They will also likely become more mindful of the way they speak to you, ensuring that they are speaking loudly and clearly so that you can understand them. They can accompany you to appointments to get your hearing tested or to get your hearing aids adjusted. In addition, reaching out to others can sometimes lead to you connect with someone else who is also going through the same challenges relating to hearing loss that you are going through! This sense of community can be helpful when dealing with hearing loss, especially at the beginning.

Finally, one of the most crucial ways to cope with hearing loss is to get the right tools to help you improve your hearing. Hearing-related technology in the form of hearing aids, Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPS), and other technologies can help you improve your hearing almost immediately. The scientific community has made great strides in developing ways to help people, so there is no reason to deal with deteriorating hearing without technological support! Additional developments in the field of hearing loss will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

SO, IN SHORT, HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOU CAN COPE WITH HEARING LOSS:

- *Come to terms with your hearing loss earlier, rather than later*
- *Reach out to your family and friends for support*
- *Get the right tools to help you improve your hearing!*

CHAPTER THREE:

Developments in the Field of Hearing Loss

Developments in the field of hearing loss have been key in giving people improved hearing and with reducing the stigma around hearing loss. Technological advancements have made hearing improvements widely accessible. In addition, awareness campaigns have helped to normalize hearing loss, creating support systems for those with hearing loss.

And finally, legal developments provide legal protections for those with hearing loss. Together, these developments have led to a substantial increase in quality of life for those with hearing loss.

HEARING AIDS

Technology has come a long way when it comes to devices that help with hearing. The first patent in the United States for a hearing aid was issued in 1855 for a device called the “Earscoop.”¹²

Edward G. Hyde, the inventor of this hearing aid, described the hearing aid in his patent application: “My improvement consists in intersecting the tube of an ear-trumpet or acoustic instrument near where it enters the ear with a passage communicating with an artificial ear, which resembles or approximates to the form of the human ear and is so arranged as to lead such vibrations as fall on it to unite the vibration passing around through the tube.”¹³

12 <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/did/timeline/>

13 http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/did/win_tl/Hydepatent1855.htm

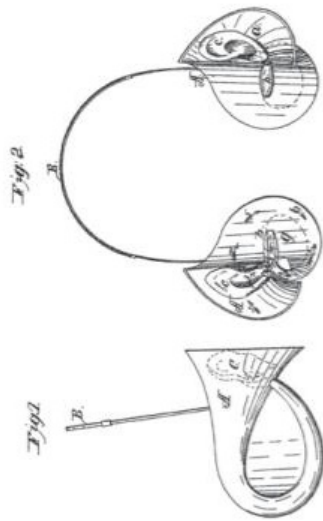


FIGURE III.I: THE EARSCOOP PATENTED BY EDWARD G. HYDE IN 1855¹⁴

Hearing aids have certainly come a long way since the Earscoop. Following the invention of the telephone and the microphone decades after the Earscoop was invented, inventors experimented with the manipulation of acoustic sound to create electronic hearing aids.

The first electric hearing aid was patented in 1892, but was never produced.¹⁵ Following this design, others electric models were manufactured for retail. In the early 1950s, transistor hearing aids were introduced, which were a significant improvement from earlier hearing aids. These transistor hearing aids allowed for the miniaturization of the hearing aid.¹⁶

In the late 1980s, and continuing into the 1990s, the first models of digitally programmable hearing devices were designed and produced. These digital hearing aids used advanced technology, like multi-channel compression and nuanced sound regulation. These digital hearing aids paved the way for the hearing aids that are available today.

Today's hearing aids are composed of three basic parts: a microphone, an amplifier, and a speaker.¹⁷ These hearing aids are typically very small and can be worn either within the ear or behind the ear. Many hearing aids today are nearly or completely unnoticeable! These hearing aids allow people with hearing loss to communicate more effectively by improving their hearing in loud settings as well as quieter settings.

¹⁴ http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/did/win_tl/Hydepatent1855.htm

¹⁵ <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/did/timeline/>

¹⁶ <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/did/timeline/>

¹⁷ <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing-aids>



FIGURE III.II: THE VARIOUS STYLES OF TODAY'S HEARING AIDS¹⁸

The basic function of a hearing aid is as follows: “The hearing aid receives sound through a microphone, which converts the sound waves to electrical signals and sends them to an amplifier. The amplifier increases the power of the signals and then sends them to the ear through a speaker.”¹⁹

Hearing aids are very successful in improving people’s hearing; however, 4 out of every 5 people who could benefit from a hearing aid don’t actually use one!²⁰ Hearing aids improve the lives of those who use them and allow for fuller participation in everyday activities.

As an example, Powered by Lucid™ hearing aids have been shown to make an incredible difference in the quality of life of people who use them. These hearing aids use patented smart technology to deliver natural sound quality that is even more sophisticated than traditional “compression” hearing aid technology.

Powered by Lucid™ hearing aids are unique because Lucid™ technology constantly analyzes your environment, making automatic adjustments to ensure you hear what you want to hear. This technology also works to minimize the sounds you don’t want to hear. The outcome is that you’re able to move from one sound environment to another without having to make adjustments to your hearing aid settings! These advanced hearing aids offer up to 96 channels. The more channels hearing aids offer, the more clarity you expect. You can think of channels on hearing aids like pixels on graphics. The more pixels, the clearer the image is. And the more channels, the clearer the sound is. When people start wearing hearing aids, they report that they are able to participate more fully in conversations. The phrase “What did you say?”

18 <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing-aids>

19 <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing-aids>

20 <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing-aids>



becomes more obsolete in their vocabulary. Even in crowded rooms, they are able to understand what the people around them are saying. This makes everyday activities more pleasurable and communication more efficient. Though hearing aids don't correct hearing loss or return one's hearing to their original state, they provide the enhancements necessary to hear well again.

LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING HEARING LOSS

Along with technological developments in the field of hearing loss, there have also been legal developments that contribute to an improved quality of life for those with hearing loss. These legislative developments help ensure that people with hearing loss are taken into account in different contexts. These developments in the legal sphere help guarantee that those with hearing loss have the necessary rights to improve their quality of life.

One important legal development was the Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988 (HAC). This Act requires the Federal Communications Commission to ensure that “all wireline telephones manufactured or imported for use in the United States and all ‘essential’ telephones, such as public phones, emergency phones and workplace phones, are hearing-aid compatible.”²¹ In 2003, the Federal Communications Commission established that these rules needed to apply to digital wireless phones as well.

21

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/hearing-aid-compatibility-wireline-and-wireless-telephones>

Another important legal development was the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA), which was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010. This Act ensures that the accessibility laws that were enacted in the 1980s and 1990s are updated to apply to 21st century technologies.²² In term of hearing loss, this Act makes sure that all telephone-like equipment is compatible with hearing aids. In addition, this act expands requirements for closed captioning on the Internet, on video programming equipment, and other forums and devices.²³ This makes the Internet and other forums and devices more accessible to those experiencing hearing loss.

The most wide-ranging Act that protects hearing loss and other conditions is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a federal law that “prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for Americans with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation.”²⁴

Hearing loss falls under the ADA on a case-by-case basis. If your hearing loss substantially limits one or more of your life activities, then you are likely protected by the ADA. The ADA establishes that people who have hearing impairments should not be denied employment opportunities, among other opportunities, based on stereotypical assumptions about hearing loss²⁵. In addition, the ADA establishes that State and local governments, along with business and nonprofit organizations that serve the public, take into account the fact that people who have hearing disabilities use different ways of communication.²⁶The Act requires these entities to communicate effectively with those who have communication disabilities. Though not all degrees of hearing loss qualify as “communication disabilities,” the Act guarantees that if one truly requires alternate forms of communication, effective forms of communication will be used with them.

These various legal protections are important to keep in mind as reminders that just because you experience hearing loss doesn’t mean your quality of life should be diminished. Along with technological advancements that are designed to improve your hearing, legal developments exist to protect your rights as they relate to hearing loss.

22 <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/21st-century-communications-and-video-accessibility-act-cvaa>

23 <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/21st-century-communications-and-video-accessibility-act-cvaa>

24 https://www.ada.gov/2010_regs.htm

25 https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_deafness.cfm

26 <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>

CHAPTER FOUR

Supporting a Loved One with Hearing Loss

INITIATING A CONVERSATION ABOUT HEARING LOSS

Though talking about hearing loss can be challenging, family members are often the first to notice when a loved one is experiencing hearing loss. If you have a family member who might be experiencing hearing loss, you might notice that you've been repeating your sentences over and over. You might notice that the TV's volume has gotten louder and louder over the weeks. Or, you might notice that your loved one no longer participates in the boisterous family discussions that they used to love.

If you notice these things, it might be time to have the tough conversation about hearing loss with your loved one. You can start by encouraging them to have their hearing tested. However, it's not unusual for people to dislike being told that they might need to seek help for something that used to be easy for them. This makes it crucial to speak with sensitivity and love when engaging in a conversation about getting tested for hearing loss.

Whether you're thinking about talking about hearing loss with a parent, a spouse, or even a close friend, there are ways to make this important conversation easier for both of you.

The first tip for engaging in this tough conversation is: gently check in with your loved one. Rather than assuming they are experiencing hearing loss, gently check in with them after an experience where you notice that they might have been having difficulty hearing.



If you noticed that they were having difficulty hearing on the phone for example, you might say: “Sounded like it was hard to hear on the phone, was the connection bad or does it feel like talking on the phone has been harder lately?” Introducing the topic casually can help your loved one feel comfortable opening up to you. It’s important to give your loved one the opportunity to speak directly about their own experiences. If they feel comfortable, they will share that they’ve been experiencing issues with hearing. At this point, you can offer to learn more about hearing loss with them in order to take the appropriate next steps.

A second tip for engaging in this tough conversation is: approach the topic playfully. Some people are especially hesitant to admit that they are experiencing difficulty hearing. Humor can help make the subject less taboo, giving you a way to talk to them about the importance of confronting their hearing loss. The next time your loved one asks you to repeat something you’ve said, you can playfully say: “I know how much you love my voice, and I want you to be able to hear it as clearly as possible forever! Have you thought about getting your hearing checked so you’ll never be able to escape my voice?” This approach doesn’t work for everyone, but introducing the topic playfully can help ease your loved one into talking about hearing loss.

A third tip about engaging in this conversation is: offer to accompany them to get their hearing checked. This tip is key to helping your loved one feel supported. Once you’ve broken the ice on the conversation about hearing loss, offer to accompany your loved one to get their hearing checked. With a Lucid Certified Hearing Specialist , these tests are free, so you can even get a hearing test with them to help them feel extra supported!

Identifying hearing loss early is important. Though the initial conversation with your loved one might be tough, rest assured that by talking about hearing loss, you are helping them take the crucial first step to preserving and improving their hearing!



PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

If you have a loved one experiencing hearing loss, you know it can be a challenging experience for them and for you. You might feel guilty for constantly feeling like you are yelling at your loved one, when really you are trying to communicate with them in a way that they can hear and understand you. Hearing loss can be an isolating experience. Having a supportive group of family and friends is essential to coping with hearing loss. There are many ways that you can support your loved one during every stage of hearing loss.

One key way to support your loved one is to encourage them to address their hearing loss early by seeking medical support and getting the tools they need to cope with their hearing loss. Early intervention for hearing loss is key to preventing other challenging health consequences. An early diagnosis and early intervention reduce the risks of other long-term conditions that are linked with hearing loss, like dementia, memory issues, and depression. Addressing hearing loss early also allows your parent to begin coping with hearing loss before it becomes too disruptive.

If you notice that your loved one is having trouble hearing with increased frequency, lovingly encourage them to seek medical attention. Though having these conversations may be hard, they will ultimately help your loved one.

In addition, it helps to be patient if you are asked to repeat things to your loved one when they do not understand you. Rather than becoming annoyed or frustrated, it can be helpful to smile and use this as an opportunity to practice enunciation and speaking more clearly. Take a moment to appreciate the beauty of connection and feel grateful that you're able to have this connection with your loved one.

One of the most important things you can do for a loved one experiencing hearing loss is to empathize with them. Consider what it might feel like if you began to experience hearing loss. Think about how it might affect your day-to-day activities and about the frustration you might feel if you weren't able to hear as well as you used to be able to. While you won't truly understand what hearing loss is like until you've gone through it, you can still empathize with your parent experiencing hearing loss and make them feel understood and supported. Sometimes, the most effective thing you can do is listen to your loved one and help them feel heard. This type of emotional support goes a long way!

Another way to support your loved one with their hearing loss is to maintain eye contact with them while communicating. Eye contact is always a powerful tool for communication and connection. It is especially powerful when speaking to a loved one with hearing loss because it allows them to read your expressions and lips to better understand what you are saying.

Distracting background noises can make it even more difficult for a person who has hearing loss to hear. To make communication easier, avoid surround sounds. Put the television on mute when you're talking to your loved one and turn the blender off. Surround sounds make it harder for those with hearing loss to make out the words that are spoken.

Being conscientious of the activities you choose to engage in is also helpful. Some activities that used to be fun for your loved one before they started experiencing hearing loss might not be fun anymore. Maybe you both loved going to the movie theater together every Friday night. Watching movies in the theater can be difficult when experiencing hearing loss, since the words can become more difficult to make out. If this is the case, you can try watching movies at home instead, making it a fun Friday night tradition with cozy blankets and homemade treats! These accommodations will help you continue doing the activities you love, in a less stressful way.



However, it's also important not to make unwarranted assumptions. Your loved one might still enjoy the experience of going to the theater, so it's important to continue communicating and checking in with them. Other activities that might become more difficult include: bustling social gatherings, meals in crowded restaurants, and concerts.

Crowded social environments like family gatherings, meals at restaurants, and outings with friends can become challenging when experiencing hearing loss. Voices can become blurred together and words can become difficult to discern. The feeling of isolation for your loved one with hearing loss might be magnified when feeling excluded in social situations. You can provide your loved one social support by staying by their side as someone they can turn to if they miss the punchline of a joke, or if they need some clarification about what has been said.

Another thing you can do to support your loved one with hearing loss is work to eliminate the stigma around hearing loss. This should go without saying, but it's usually never acceptable to make fun of your loved one's hearing loss or minimize the challenges that accompany their hearing loss. It is also important for you to stand up for them in the company of others. There is no shame in experiencing hearing loss, so there's no need to act like it's a taboo. You can create space to discuss hearing loss honestly and openly. By eliminating the stigma around hearing loss, you will be offering crucial emotional support that will not only help your loved one, but all people experiencing hearing loss!

Finally, remember that hearing loss does not define your loved one. Just because they are experiencing hearing loss doesn't mean they don't want to or aren't able to communicate with you. Don't let hearing loss change the dynamic of your relationship with your loved one. They are the same person they have always been, and with your support, your relationship will only continue to deepen.

CONCLUSION

Hearing loss is an extremely manageable condition. With proper attention, and with the right tools, one can live a perfectly normal life with hearing loss.

Through research, there have been opportunities to meet people who have hearing loss and people who work to develop and provide solutions for hearing loss. These stories are touching. There are the stories of grandparents who weren't able to hear their grandchildren's voices until they were fitted with the right pair of hearing aids. There are the stories of people who succeeded in keeping their their jobs once they found the right hearing aids and passed their hearing tests. There are the stories of veterans and civil rights activists who were fitted with hearing aids and were finally able to regain the ability to hear the voices of the people they fought and advocated for.

Hearing loss can affect anyone, but with technological advancements, your ability to hear is recoverable.

On the next page there are a the key points from this e-book, arranged by chapter, to refresh your memory later or to help you organize the information in your mind.

FROM CHAPTER ONE:

- *If you have hearing loss, you're not alone! Approximately 1 in 3 people above the age of 65 have hearing loss in America.*
- *The medical term for age-related hearing loss is presbycusis*
- *Age-related hearing loss can be difficult to self-identify; however, the people in your life might notice that you're asking them to repeat themselves more often than before or having trouble hearing them when they speak*
- *The diagnostic process for hearing loss is non-invasive and relatively quick*
- *Diagnosing hearing loss early has many benefits*
- *Hearing skills and thinking skills are often tied together, and hearing loss has been linked to cognitive dysfunction like dementia in those older than 65*
- *There are many different possible causes of age-related hearing loss*

FROM CHAPTER TWO:

- *Having trouble with hearing loss can affect your work, your interpersonal relationships, and your hobbies; however, hearing you have the power to cope with hearing loss*
- *Though hearing loss is a physiological issue, it has emotional implications*
- *Feelings of embarrassment, isolation, shame, and frustration are not uncommon with hearing loss*
- *Seeking support for hearing loss is immensely beneficial for one's emotional and physical health*
- *Coping with hearing loss involves: coming to terms with your hearing loss, reaching out to friends and family for support, getting the right tools to help you improve your hearing*

FROM CHAPTER THREE:

- *Technological developments such as hearing aids and Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs) help improve people's hearing*
- *Today's hearing aids are composed of three basic parts: a microphone, an amplifier, and a speaker*
- *Many hearing aids today are nearly or completely unnoticeable*
- *Hearing aids allow people with hearing loss to communicate more effectively by improving their hearing in all settings*
- *4 out of 5 people who could benefit from a hearing aid don't actually use one*
- *Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs) are cheaper than hearing aids and a good choice for those who need a little bit of help with hearing, but who don't need hearing aids yet*

FROM CHAPTER FOUR:

- *Family members are often the first to notice when a loved one is experiencing hearing loss*
- *It is crucial to speak with sensitivity and love when engaging in a conversation about getting tested for hearing loss*
- *Talking about hearing loss with your loved one helps them take the crucial first step to preserving and improving their hearing*
- *Having a supportive group of family and friends is key to coping with hearing loss*
- *Empathizing with your loved one when they have hearing loss is one of the most meaningful things you can do*
- *Supporting your loved one with hearing loss can look like: making eye contact with them when communicating, decreasing background noise when communicating with them, making sure the activities you participate in are accessible and enjoyable to them, and work to eliminate the stigma around hearing loss*

We hope this e-book gave you an increased perspective on hearing loss. We believe in your strength and know that you will thrive!