

### Your Guide to Communication with Hearing Loss

Communication is a two-way process involving more than just hearing the words someone speaks.

Our ears pick up sounds which are passed along to the brain for processing. The brain then makes sense of the sounds and turns them into meaning.

Whenever there is a loss of hearing, even if it is mild, the quality of the signal reaching the brain is degraded. As a result, the brain needs to work harder to make meaning of the sound - it needs to 'fill-in' the gaps or in effect, try to guess what is being said. This problem is greatly exacerbated when there is competing background noise further degrading the signal.

Hearing loss therefore increases the workload of the brain. This is often mentally exhausting, leading to tiredness, fatigue and sometimes irritability. It is not uncommon for this to result in withdrawal from social situations where listening fatigue outweighs the enjoyment of interacting with others. This can further lead to isolation, feelings of exclusion and sometimes depression. There is also growing evidence that these effects are correlated with cognitive decline and even dementia.



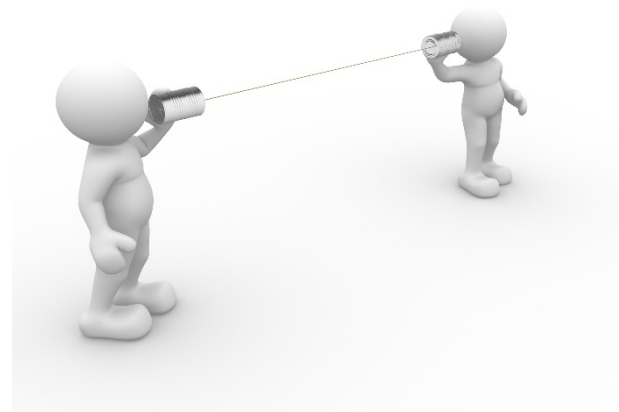
### Communication Strategies

Even when the person with hearing loss uses hearing aids and active listening strategies, it is very important the communication partner is aware of the challenges and uses positive communication strategies themselves. Following are some examples of these strategies:

### Key points

- Our ears collect sounds which are passed along to the brain for processing.
- When there is hearing loss, even if it is mild, the signal available for the brain to process is degraded. Therefore, the brain needs to work harder to 'fill-in' the gaps. This effect is greatly exacerbated when there is background noise.
- Hearing loss increases the workload of the brain. This is mentally exhausting and can lead to tiredness, fatigue, and irritability. Further, it often leads to social withdrawal, feelings of isolation and exclusion and sometimes depression.
- There is growing evidence that hearing loss and its effects, are significant modifiable risk factors for dementia.

- **Ensure face-to-face communication as much as possible.** Directly face each other in a well-lit environment on the same level. Visual cues provide a lot of information about meaning and intent. This greatly assists the brain to 'fill-in' sounds that are missing or degraded as a result of hearing loss.
- **Ensure you have the listener's attention prior to engaging in conversation.** For the listener with hearing loss, it takes a little longer for them to 'tune-in' to the conversation. This is because the brain needs to work harder to process what is being heard and this often takes a little longer. It is therefore vital to ensure you have the listener's attention prior to engaging in conversation. This gives them the opportunity to focus on what is being said and avoids missing words at the beginning of the conversation.
- **Avoid talking from another room.** Talking from another room further degrades the sound quality and eliminates important visual and attention cues.
- **Speak clearly and a little slower.** Shouting or very loud speech often sounds distorted and creates more difficulty. Slow and distinct is almost always better than loud and exaggerated.
- **Avoid speaking quickly or using sentences that are overly complex.** Slightly slower speech with pauses between sentences or phrases will be much easier for the listener and gives the speaker a chance to verify they have been understood.
- **Consider positioning.** If the listener hears better from one ear than the other, positioning may impact how well the conversation is received.
- **Reduce background noise as much as possible.** Background noise always exacerbates communication difficulties associated with hearing loss. This may be as simple as the television or radio in the background. Often the background noise cannot be controlled, however, if there is opportunity to keep the noise source behind the listener with hearing loss, this will be advantageous. For example, at a restaurant or coffee shop, try keeping the speaker sitting against a wall if possible so that noise sources are behind rather than in front.
- **Be aware of loud noise.** A common side-effect of hearing loss is reduced tolerance of loud sounds. It is not uncommon for an individual with hearing loss to find loud sounds more uncomfortable than someone with normal hearing.
- **Try re-phrasing where necessary.** There may be certain words or phrases that are difficult to understand despite repetition. Try to find a different way of saying the same thing rather than repeating the original words over and over.



- **Avoid sudden subject changes in conversation.** Always take time to ensure the listener with hearing loss is aware the topic of conversation has changed or that they are still following along. In group situations, the subject of conversation may have moved on by someone else, so where possible, ensure the hearing-impaired person is aware of the current topic.
- **Never say “never mind”.** Sometimes a hearing-impaired person will need repeats of the conversation. Assist them to understand, even if you view it as not important. Phrases like ‘never mind,’ ‘it doesn’t matter’ or ‘it’s not important’ are dismissive and can promote withdrawal and feelings of isolation.
- **Ensure you have been heard correctly,** such as, if you are giving specific information, for instance, time, place, phone numbers, etc. This may involve having them repeated back. Many numbers and single words sound alike and can be easily misheard. Consider providing important information and directions in writing or text form.
- **Be aware of non-verbal cues.** When speaking to a person with hearing impairment, pay attention to them and their responses. For example, a puzzled or vague look may indicate they have not understood and may require more leading questions to check their understanding.
- **Take turns in speaking.** Avoid talking over each other or interrupting others when they are speaking.

## In Summary

Hearing loss causes impairment of communication. Communication is a two-way process and therefore requires accommodations on both sides. It is very easy for either communication partner to become frustrated and impatient, however with some understanding of the challenges and ensuring positive communication strategies as a habit, it is very possible to ensure both parties are heard and understood, and meaningful relationships can be developed, maintained, and restored.

The above provides general strategies to assist when communicating with someone with hearing impairment. Individual circumstances may vary and require further discussion with your communication partner. Your Hello Hearing Audiologist is here to help.

### About Us

We are different! Our passion is to provide you with the optimal solution for your unique hearing needs to get you back in the conversation.

Hello Hearing is your local authority on hearing solutions, being the only independent and 100% local, family-owned hearing clinic. Our independence ensures we can give you unbiased advice on the full range of reputable hearing devices, including hearing implants. Our specialist syringe-free ear wax removal service also helps keep your ears at their best.

Founded in 2015, Hello Hearing is owned and operated by two born-and-bred, local audiologists and brothers, Jason and Matthew Le Dilly, who each hold around 15 years of experience in the profession. We are trusted by a large local network of GPs and Ear Specialists in providing comprehensive and accurate assessments, many of whom now refer exclusively to our clinic.

Our objective is to provide personalised, holistic hearing care, not to be purely a hearing aid reseller as are the majority of hearing centres across Australia today. We feel that trustworthy service and advice can be difficult to find these days, but you have our assurance we will strive to do our best by you and your family.

As a family-owned clinic, we are proud of what we stand for and hold many years of experience helping others to reconnect.

**If you're finding it more difficult keeping up with the conversation, give us a call today  
- we'd love to hear from you!**

