

## Centre of Hearing and Balance Disorders

# Living with someone who has a Gradual Hearing loss

## How do I identify my partner's hearing is getting worse?

You may find that your partner:

- Needs a lot of the conversation repeated several times
- Misunderstands what is being said
- Complains that you are not speaking clearly or loudly enough
- Does not hear you when you come into a room
- Does not hear the doorbell or the telephone ring
- Cannot cope with pubs, parties and other noisy environments
- Turns the television up too loud for your comfort
- Speaks in a monotonous tone of voice, or is not speaking as clearly as before.

## How does my partner's hearing loss affect how they hear?

If your partner has a gradual hearing loss they can usually hear vowel sounds clearly but not the consonants. Consonant sounds are crucial for carrying the meaning of words. Consonants create the high frequency sounds of speech and, unfortunately, it is the high frequency sounds that are lost when hearing worsens. For example, instead of hearing "What shall we have for supper?" your partner may hear "Wha- ar- we -av -or -ba?". Your partner will gradually need to rely more on lip-reading to 'fill in the gaps'. A lot of lip-reading is guesswork. Some sounds and their lip shapes can be seen on the lips but some, such as p, m or b, are easily confused because they look similar. Other sounds are made in the back of the throat, so are invisible, for example – k or g. Lip-reading can 'fill in' the consonants that someone can no longer hear, but can lead to some misunderstandings – for example, 'biscuit' looks like 'big kiss'. See below for more information on lip-reading.

## What does it mean for me and my partner if they have a hearing loss?

- Chatting is hard work and tiring.
- Your partner will have less time to relax because they will be concentrating more on communication.
- Your partner may become isolated and start to miss social events because communication is too much of a strain.



## Patient Information

- If your partner's hearing loss means that everyone's speech is quiet for them, they will probably start to speak more softly as well.

### **How can I help my partner?**

It is important that you understand what has happened to your partner's hearing. You both need to accept the hearing loss and be positive about it.

- Be supportive and patient.
- Don't try to do everything for your partner – if the doorbell rings, encourage them to go and answer it.
- Try not to speak for your partner or leave them out of the conversation.
- Encourage your partner to explain their hearing loss to friends and family.
- Carry on socialising – don't give up your normal social activities.
- Try not to let your partner apologise for being hard of hearing – it is no-one's fault.
- Set a good example for others to follow. Speak clearly and a little more slowly so your partner can understand you and other people can see how to communicate with your partner effectively.

### **What does it mean for your partner to wear a hearing aid?**

Hearing aids help people with a hearing loss improve their level of hearing but they do not restore hearing to normal levels. Wearing a hearing aid(s) can be a big step for your partner to take.

Even when the aid(s) is first fitted, your partner may be disappointed if it does not work as well as hoped. Once they are used to wearing it, encourage your partner to wear the aid(s) for longer periods of time.

If your partner still finds the aid(s) difficult or thinks it is not working properly, encourage him or her to go back to the specialist who fitted it. You might like to go with them, so that you both understand how to use and maintain the hearing aid(s).

Some people feel self-conscious about wearing a hearing aid. Your partner may only want to wear it at certain times or in certain situations. If you can, encourage your partner to wear the hearing aid more visibly as most people will make a greater effort to communicate clearly.

### **How can I communicate better with my partner?**

- Make sure you have your partner's attention before you say anything.
- Use your partner's name to attract their attention. People usually hear their name better than they hear other words.
- Don't approach your partner from behind, or tap him or her on the back to attract attention. Approach from the side or from in front.
- Turn the radio or the television off before you start a conversation.

### **Are there any tips to help deal with everyday situations?**

These tips can be used in different social and everyday situations.

# Patient Information

## **Going to the doctor or hospital**

- Encourage your partner to tell staff that they have a hearing loss and/or wear a hearing aid(s).
- Encourage your partner to ask the doctor to move to a different chair to make it easier to lip-read.
- If your partner is worried that they will not understand what the doctor is saying, go along to the surgery with your partner.
- Your partner could ask the GP to write down important details such as dates and times, prescriptions and how many times to take tablets.

## **Going out to a restaurant/party/pub**

- Your partner may not enjoy going out in a large crowd as it is difficult to lip-read a lot of people at once.
- Ask the pub or restaurant manager to turn down the background music if it is too loud. Explain how difficult it is for a hearing aid user to cope with background music.
- Sit on your partner's 'better side' – the side on which they can hear most clearly – so you can repeat key words that they may have missed.
- Choose a place where the lighting is suitable for lip-reading.
- Try to sit away from the kitchen area, as banging doors and crockery will affect someone who is wearing a hearing aid.

## **Cinema, concert and theatre visits**

Cinemas, concert halls and theatres may have a loop or infrared system.

- Pre-book the best seats for watching, listening and using the loop or infrared system. When you book, check which seats have the best coverage from the induction loop/infrared system.
- Check that the loop system is working. Ask for it to be switched on, if necessary. If it is not working properly, talk to the management.
- Your partner might like to turn down their hearing aid(s) at the end of the performance so that the clapping noise is not uncomfortable.

## **How do I cope with my partner's hearing loss?**

- You may find that your partner's hearing loss is stressful for you. Remember that frustration is normal when you cannot communicate with your partner as well as you used to. Here are some suggestions you might find useful:
- Share the load with another family member or friend.
- Go out together with a mutual group of friends so that neither of you feels isolated.

## Patient Information

- Have time for yourself – continue with your hobbies, sports or other interests. Do not feel you have to give up a hobby or interest because your partner is not able to share it with you.
- Discuss your needs and concerns with your partner, and if necessary, with your GP.

This information is based on information from the RNID website:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/your-hearing/ways-of-communicating/communication-tips/are-you-deaf-aware.aspx>

If you want further information please telephone:

Ann-Marie Hawkins or Bernadette Parker Telephone: 024 7696 6444

Or contact the: **Health Information Centre**

Situated in the hospital's main entrance opposite reception

Open: Monday to Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Telephone: 024 7696 6051

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