

# Age-Related Hearing Loss

If you are one of the nearly 10 million Americans over the age of 65, then you are likely to have some degree of difficulty hearing. The chance of developing hearing loss doubles with each decade of life.

## Why do people lose their hearing when they age?

As people age, changes take place in the entire hearing system. Hearing loss due to the aging process is called *presbycusis*. In most cases, hearing loss happens slowly over time, and the individual may not easily notice it. Hearing loss usually happens in both ears and may affect the person's ability to understand speech, especially in a noisy environment.

## What happens when you do not manage your hearing loss?

People with untreated hearing loss are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, falls, negative impacts on job performance, and cognitive decline. Hearing loss that is unmanaged may have serious emotional and social effects on older adults by:

- cutting them off from family members and friends,
- limiting social activities and engagement,
- lowering their quality of life, and
- increasing the likelihood of communication strain with family and friends.

## What can help older adults hear better?

Working with a qualified audiologist, older adults can evaluate the benefits of hearing aid use and communication strategies and can learn to overcome some of the adverse effects that hearing loss can have on their quality of life. In addition, here are some tips that older adults can use for good listening:

- Use appropriate hearing aids and assistive technology.
- Get closer. Don't try to listen to someone from another room. Go where the talker is and try to minimize background noise.
- Take listening breaks. You can focus better if you are rested.

- Ask the person talking to slow down when they are talking too fast.
- Ask the speaker to turn so that you can see their face.
- Don't bluff! Let the speaker know when you are having trouble hearing or understanding them.

## Why do so many older adults with hearing loss refuse to use hearing aids?

Some people may not admit or recognize that they are having trouble hearing. Denial is the most significant barrier to hearing aid use.

The following are some of the most common reasons that older people give for not using a hearing aid:

- I can't hear because of other people—everyone is mumbling, or they are not speaking up.
- My hearing is not bad enough for a hearing aid.
- Hearing aids cost too much.
- Hearing aids are too hard to get.

## What can family members do to help?

Hearing loss affects not only the person with hearing loss but often family members as well. Family members and friends can do some simple things to help an older adult carry on a normal conversation:

- Speak clearly and in a normal tone of voice.
- Don't shout. Shouting makes it harder for the person with hearing loss to understand you.
- Get the person's attention before speaking.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth and speak face-to-face.
- Talk in quiet places.
- Build breaks into your conversation.
- If they ask you to repeat yourself, don't just repeat but also rephrase.

# Age-Related Hearing Loss

---

**Act early on hearing concerns.**

Early identification and management of hearing loss can have lasting benefits for overall health by allowing for continued engagement, thus supporting overall brain and mental health.

Acting early on hearing concerns means maintaining quality of life and reducing social isolation, and it may decrease the risk for depression and cognitive decline or dementia.

Discuss your concerns with a primary care provider to seek appropriate care.

Consult with an audiologist, who can conduct a hearing evaluation and help with your individual hearing needs. [Find a certified audiologist on the ASHA ProFind online directory.](#)

Content contributed by ASHA member Danielle Powell, AuD, PhD.

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit [www.asha.org/aud/pei/](http://www.asha.org/aud/pei/).

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



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

2200 Research Boulevard  
Rockville, MD 20850  
800-638-8255

Email: [audiology@asha.org](mailto:audiology@asha.org)  
Website: [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

---

*Compliments of*

**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)**  
2200 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850 \* 800-638-8255