

## Living with hearing loss - Tips for communicating well

### Life changes when hearing is lost

Hearing loss affects the way a person relates to the world and the people around them.

Each person reacts and feels differently. Some have trouble accepting that they have a problem, especially when the hearing loss is gradual. Others may feel frustrated, be embarrassed about asking for help, or become withdrawn and depressed.

Life can change for friends, family and colleagues too. Long-established patterns of communicating may stop working as well as they used to.

Learning about hearing loss and developing new communication tactics can help significantly with quality of life. And everyone has a part to play.

### Hearing loss is common

In New Zealand, it is estimated that 10% of the population—and 33% of those aged over 65—have a hearing loss that affects their daily lives.

Each person who experiences hearing loss will respond differently.

Some people face their hearing loss cheerfully, embracing any technology that may help and willingly learning new communication skills.

Others may react with denial, frustration, withdrawal or depression.

When hearing loss is gradual, it's common for people to take up to eight years to have their hearing loss confirmed. That can mean several years of missed opportunities to maintain or improve quality of life.

### Tips for people with hearing loss

Admitting to yourself—and others—that you have a hearing loss can be difficult.

But the longer you delay taking action, the more noticeable your hearing loss will be. Good communication will keep getting more difficult.

And you may even become dependant on others to do your hearing for you.

Accepting your hearing loss is the first step towards keeping your independence and coping well with life. Acceptance means new opportunities for you to

- Get help to hear better
- Learn good communication tactics
- Put resources in place for situations where your hearing loss can be a difficulty

### Be patient and honest

When talking to someone with good hearing, be patient. They may just be learning to talk with someone who has a hearing loss.

It might be a fairly new experience for you too. So try to accept that you may feel tired, frustrated or perhaps uncomfortable about asking for help.

To help you both to communicate well:

- Be honest about what you need—share the tips for people with good hearing
- Arrange yourself so that the light falls on the speaker's face
- Tell the hearing person whether their efforts to communicate well are working
- Tell the hearing person if you're getting tired
- As a back up, have a pen and paper handy

### Tips for people with good hearing

Not everyone with a hearing loss wears hearing aids. And even if someone does wear a hearing aid, this is never the same as having a fully-functioning ear.

That's because hearing aids don't correct a person's hearing in the way that glasses commonly correct vision. But hearing aids *do* help the wearer make the most of the hearing they have. And hearing aids compensate, to a greater or lesser degree, for the person's hearing loss.

### To help you both to communicate well:

- Get the person's attention first  
Before you start to speak, maybe touch the person gently on the arm.
- Speak face-to-face  
Face the person directly and maintain eye contact.
- Keep the light on your face  
Never stand with a light or window at your back as this will shadow your face.
- Speak a little more slowly and clearly  
Slow your speech just a little from how you speak normally. Pronounce your words clearly but without exaggerating your lip movements.
- Reduce background noise  
Turn the stereo or television down or off. Or move to a quieter room.
- Avoid covering your mouth with your hands or an object while speaking  
If you have a moustache, keep it well trimmed. Don't eat or smoke when you talk.
- Never try speaking to the person from another room or when facing away from them

### **Keep trying**

If at first the hearing impaired person doesn't understand you, be patient. Try not to feel frustrated or make the person feel as though *they* are the problem.

- Repeat, but if this doesn't work, try rephrasing
- Don't shout! Shouting distorts your mouth, distorts your speech and makes your voice higher-pitched.
- Write things down
- Learn the finger spelling alphabet
- Organise an interpreter (via the Deaf Association of NZ) if the person you want to speak to uses sign language

Special thanks to Tauranga (BOP) Hearing Association Inc. for use of information from the booklet *Hear This! All you need to know about hearing loss.*

**Email:** [tauranga@hearing.co.nz](mailto:tauranga@hearing.co.nz)

Living with hearing loss is a learning curve. Everyone can benefit from finding out about good communication tactics.

## **More information & support**

### **NFD (National Foundation for the Deaf)**

[www.nfd.org.nz](http://www.nfd.org.nz)

205 Parnell Road

P O Box 37729, Parnell, Auckland 1151

**Ph** 0800 867 446

**Tel/TTY** (09) 307 2922

**Fax** (09) 307 2923

**Email** [enquiries@nfd.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nfd.org.nz)

### **Hearing Therapists - LIFE Unlimited**

[www.life.nzl.org](http://www.life.nzl.org)

Central House, Level 5

26 Brandon Street, Wellington

**Ph** 0800 008 011

**Tel** 04 499 5851

**Fax** 04 499 5853

**Email** [info@life.nzl.org](mailto:info@life.nzl.org)

### **The Hearing Association**

[www.hearing.org.nz](http://www.hearing.org.nz)

c/- Suite 1, 5 Bouverie St, Petone

P O Box 5876, Lambton Quay, Wellington 6145

**Ph** 0800 23 34 45

**Tel** (04) 939 6754

**Fax** (04) 939 6719

**Email** [enquiries@hearing.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@hearing.org.nz)

### **Deaf Association of New Zealand**

[www.deaf.co.nz](http://www.deaf.co.nz)

1836-1848 Great North Road

P O Box 15770, New Lynn, Auckland 0640

**Tel/TTY** (09) 828 3282

**Fax** (09) 828 3235

**Email** [national@deaf.co.nz](mailto:national@deaf.co.nz)

We've prepared this fact sheet using information from external sources and advice from NZ-based experts.

The information, while accurate at time of printing, cannot replace expert advice from a hearing professional. Always seek help quickly for any ear or hearing problem.

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