



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Hearing Loss in Older Adults

Hearing loss is common in older adults. Yet, many people do not know they have hearing loss because hearing is lost little by little over time. Most older adults do not lose all of their hearing. Some sounds are just harder to hear, such as women's or children's voices. Often the person thinks everyone else is mumbling.

It is important to know if an older adult has hearing loss because it can lead to other problems. Many older adults are embarrassed by hearing loss. They may spend less time with others and feel lonely. They also may feel lonely when they are with others, because it is hard to join the conversation. Hearing loss also can impact safety. For example, it can be harder to hear fire alarms or car horns. It also can be harder to hear advice from doctors or pharmacists.

Someone with hearing loss may...

Ask "What?" a lot when others are talking.

Complain that people are mumbling.

Have a hard time hearing people on the telephone.

Talk loudly, or play the radio or TV really loud.

Hold their hand up to their ear, or lean in to the person speaking.

Say things that do not make sense in the conversation.

Reasons for Hearing Loss in Older Adults

Ear drum problems are a main cause of hearing loss in older adults. The problems often start in young adults and continue over many years.

- **Workplace noise.** People who work near machines or other loud noises are more likely to have hearing loss. Protective ear muffs should be used when working near loud noises to help prevent hearing loss.
- **Loud music.** Many people also play music loud enough to cause hearing loss when in their cars, at home, or listening on ear buds or headphones. Live music also can cause hearing loss. Lower the volume, and wear ear plugs to concerts to help protect hearing.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Care Partner Information

Other things may also increase the chances of hearing loss. But these are less likely than loud noises to lead to hearing loss.

- **Chronic disease.** Older adults who have high blood pressure or diabetes may be more likely to have hearing loss. These diseases can damage nerves and small blood vessels that are needed for hearing.
- **Some medications** may lead to hearing loss in some people. Talk to a doctor about any changes in hearing after starting a new medication.

How to Treat Hearing Loss in Older Adults

A person with changes in hearing should talk to their doctor. In some cases, hearing loss is caused by too much wax or an ear infection, and can be treated. The type of hearing loss caused by age and hearing damage cannot be fixed. But it can be helped with hearing aids and therapy that teaches a person to listen differently and read lips. Below are tips to improve communication with someone who has hearing loss.

How to Talk to Someone with Hearing Loss

Turn off TVs or radios. Move away from other noises.

Make sure the person can see the speakers face so they can lip read.

Speak slowly and clearly. Do not shout.

Speak in a deeper voice

Use short sentences.

If the person does not understand, change the order of the words or use different words that mean the same thing.

If they can hear better with one ear, try to speak to that side.

Use hands to point and gesture.

Ask if they understood what was said.

Write the message.

Useful Websites

Hearing Health Professional near you:

http://www.hearingloss.org/support_resources/search-professionals

National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders (NIDCD):

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/age-related-hearing-loss>

Written By: Laura M. Vitkus, MPH

Care Partner Information ~ Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging