

Hearing Loss and Seniors

A Caregiver Guide



*There are only four kinds of people in the world –
those who have been caregivers,
those who are currently caregivers,
those who will be caregivers, and
those who will need caregivers.*

~ Rosalyn Carter

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

If you are a caregiver for a person with a hearing loss, you probably have many questions and concerns. The responsibility for caring for seniors with a hearing loss requires the acquisition of new information and the development of special skills. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with some basic information about hearing loss and related caregiver issues. Please contact your local Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) office for further information or assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Hearing loss reduces a person's ability to communicate easily. Untreated hearing loss deprives not only seniors of easy exchange of feelings, ideas, and other information, but also their family, friends and caregivers.

Seniors with hearing loss often experience increased feelings of isolation, depression, loneliness, anger, fear, frustration and disappointment. As a direct consequence of those feelings, hearing loss may also negatively impact a senior's physical health.

Without information, appropriate technology and training seniors may withdraw from others because they have difficulty communicating. They may feel fearful about living on their own because they are not aware of common environmental sounds such as someone knocking at the door, the telephone ringing or emergency vehicle sirens. However, seniors and caregivers can learn how to effectively manage hearing loss so seniors can lead independent and productive lives.



SIGNS OF A HEARING LOSS

Common behaviors seniors with a hearing loss may exhibit include:

- ♦ Has trouble distinguishing between similar sounding words.
- ♦ Gives inappropriate responses.
- ♦ Seems to have more difficulty understanding when women and children speak.
- ♦ Turns head to one side or cups one ear to hear better.
- ♦ Frequently responds with a smile and a nod without further comments.
- ♦ Has difficulty understanding when conversing in the car.
- ♦ Seems to withdraw during group discussions or family gatherings.
- ♦ Frequently does not hear the phone or doorbell ringing.
- ♦ Turns volume up loudly when watching television or listening to the radio.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT A HEARING LOSS

The first thing the senior should do is get a medical evaluation from his physician. The physician may refer him to a doctor who specializes in diseases of the ear. This specialist may be an ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT), otologist or otolaryngologist. If the physician or specialist feels the senior would benefit from a hearing aid, he may make a referral to an audiologist for a hearing test. After the hearing test is completed, the senior should ask the audiologist for a copy of the audiogram. The purpose of such a thorough examination is to verify the hearing loss and recommend appropriate treatment.

Hearings aids can be purchased from a certified hearing aid dispenser and an audiologist who sells hearing aids.

Minnesota law requires all audiologists and hearing aid dispensers to have a certificate from the Minnesota Department of Health before they are allowed to sell hearing aids. Ask to see this certificate.

It is also a good idea to check the credentials of the person fitting the senior with hearing aids. You may contact the Minnesota Department of Health to see if the hearing aid dispenser or audiologist is appropriately certified. Call 651/201-

3729 or go online to:

<https://pqc.health.state.mn.us/hopVerify/loginAction.do>

(enter in the hearing professional's name)

You may also want to contact the Minnesota Better Business Bureau at 651/699-1111 or www.mnd.bbb.org to see if any complaints have been filed against this hearing aid business.

Asking the hearing aid dispenser or audiologist questions is important when buying a hearing aid. If they are unable or unwilling to answer these questions, consider shopping elsewhere. **Some** examples of questions may include:



- ★ What is the cost of the hearing aid?
- ★ What guarantees or warranties come with the hearing aid?
- ★ How long do the guarantees or warranties last?
- ★ How much will servicing the hearing aid cost?
- ★ Do you provide a loaner if the hearing aid needs repairing?
- ★ What does the senior pay if he doesn't buy the hearing aid after the trial period?

It is important to have choices when selecting a hearing aid. One type of hearing aid DOES NOT work for everyone! Ask the audiologist or hearing aid dispenser if they handle various styles and brands of hearing aids.

HEARING AID MYTHS

There are many myths associated with hearing aids. Here are a few of the common ones:



- ◆ It is best if you have your hearing tested at home where you do most of your listening. **False.** For accuracy, the test must be conducted in a soundproof room.
- ◆ The hearing problem is not bad enough for a hearing aid. **False.** General or sweeping statements concerning hearing loss can be very misleading. Consult with a doctor (preferably one who specializes in diseases of the ear) or audiologist to see if a hearing aid or assistive listening device would be beneficial.
- ◆ You could save hundreds of dollars buying a hearing aid through the mail. **False.** Actually you could end up losing hundreds of dollars. The wrong hearing aid or improperly fitted hearing aid can be worse than no hearing aid at all.
- ◆ It is best that you sign the required medical waiver at the hearing aid seller's office. That way you don't have to see a doctor and be charged again for the same testing and evaluation. **False.** The Food and Drug Administration of the Federal Government has ruled that your best interests are served by having your ears examined by a doctor (preferably one who specializes in diseases of the ear) prior to purchasing a hearing aid.
- ◆ Behind-the-ear hearing aids are old fashioned, you will do much better with the newer in-the-ear hearing aids. **False.** Behind-the-ear hearing aids are as "state of the art" as in-the-ear hearing aids or in-the-canal hearing aids. An audiologist can make the best recommendation for the type and degree of hearing loss.

NOTE: Contact your local Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services office for more comprehensive information about hearing aids.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The 21st century will most likely bring even more advanced technology to assist those with a hearing loss. Current assistive technology includes: listening devices, alerting devices (which alert people to various environmental sounds and use a flashing light, louder than normal sound or vibrations to alert the deaf or hard of hearing person), amplified and text telephones, and much more!

The benefits of assistive technology for those with a hearing loss can be tremendous. Assistive technology can help the senior with a hearing loss to live independently and safely, and keep him connected with sounds of the everyday world. Remember that as with all technology, prices range from low to high – depending on the sophistication of the technology being used. It is important to look at benefits versus cost.



Starting from the center top and going clockwise: amplified phone, FM assistive listening device, smoke alarm with flashing light and vibration, and TV listening device, alarm clock with bed shaker.

COMMUNICATION TIPS

An important strategy is learning how to communicate with a senior who has a hearing loss. It is important not to assume he can hear and *understand* what you are saying if he is wearing a hearing aid.



- Begin the conversation by getting the senior's attention.
- Converse in a quiet environment with few visual and auditory distractions.
- Communicate in a well-lit area; at the same time avoid standing in front of bright lights or windows.
- Keep your face and mouth clearly visible. Do not eat, smoke, chew gum or cover your mouth.
- Enunciate your words clearly, avoiding exaggerated lip movements or shouting.
- Maintain eye contact. If you have to turn away from the senior, wait until you re-establish eye contact before continuing your conversation.
- Clarify your message by using facial expressions and gestures. Pointing to appropriate objects or using visual aids can also be very helpful.
- Introduce one idea or fact at a time.
- Only one person should talk at a time in a group situation.
- Rephrase your message if the senior does not understand you.

CAREGIVER GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are presented to assist caregivers with meeting the challenge of providing quality care to a senior with a hearing loss:

- Educate yourself about hearing loss and the resources available to assist you in meeting the needs of the recipient of your care.
- Recognize the signs of hearing loss and make appropriate referrals to an audiologist, otologist and/or otolaryngologist for appropriate diagnosis and treatment.
- Be sensitive to the impact hearing loss has on the senior and the stages of adjustment he may go through before accepting it.
- Be aware of the myths associated with hearing loss and dispel them with facts.
- Take steps to prevent and minimize hearing loss by reducing environmental noise, treating ear infections, and eliminating the use of ototoxic drugs that damage hearing.
- Modify the environment, when possible, to accommodate the special needs of those with a hearing loss.
- Seek the support of professionals who have expertise providing quality care to seniors with hearing loss.
- Learn to communicate effectively by identifying the communication preferences of the senior and using strategies that enhance communication.
- Utilize assistive technology to facilitate communication, improve understanding, and promote a senior's independence.

RESOURCES

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)
(see the back cover for your local office)

www.dhhsd.org

Telephone Equipment Distribution Program (TED)

800/657-3663 (VOICE)

888/206-6555 (TTY)

(or call your local DHHS office)

www.tedprogram.org

Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200

Bethesda, MD 20814

301/657-2248

www.hearingloss.org

American Academy of Audiology (AAA)

11730 Plaza America Drive, Suite 300

Reston, VA 20190

800/222-2336

www.audiology.org

Center for Hearing and Communication

50 Broadway, 6th Floor

New York, NY 10004

917/305-7700 (VOICE)

917/305-7999 (TTY)

www.chchearing.org

AARP

601 E St., NW

Washington, DC 20049

888/687-2277 (VOICE)

877/434-7598 (TTY)

www.aarp.org

For more information about dealing with hearing loss, please contact your local Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services office.

DHHS – Northeast

Virginia

888/234-1322 (VOICE)

866/488-3997 (TTY)

218/550-5153 (VP)

dhhs.virginia@state.mn.us

DHHS – East & West Central

St. Cloud

800/456-3690 (VOICE)

866/488-3909 (TTY)

320/227-2515 (VP)

dhhs.stcloud@state.mn.us

DHHS – Northeast

Duluth

888/234-1322 (VOICE)

866/488-3833 (TTY)

218/206-8452 (VP)

dhhs.duluth@state.mn.us

DHHS - Metro

St. Paul

651/431-5940 (VOICE)

888/206-6513 (TTY)

651/964-1514 (VP)

dhhs.metro@state.mn.us

DHHS – Northwest

Moorhead

800/456-7589 (VOICE)

866/488-3829 (TTY)

218/227-5495 (VP)

dhhs.moorhead@state.mn.us

DHHS - South

Mankato

800/311-1148 (VOICE)

866/266-2461 (TTY)

507/322-3518 (VP)

dhhs.mankato@state.mn.us

This information is available in accessible formats for individuals with disabilities by calling the DHHS office closest to you.



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division

Minnesota Department of Human Services

www.dhhsd.org