

# Losing your hearing as you get older



**RNID** ● 

for deaf and hard of hearing people



**More than half  
of people over  
60 have a  
hearing loss**

## **About this leaflet**

If you are over 60 and you think your hearing is not as good as it used to be, this leaflet is for you. It looks at:

- The reason why many people become hard of hearing as they get older – a condition known as **presbycusis**.
- Signs to watch out for if you are not sure if you are losing your hearing.
- What to do if you think you have a hearing loss.
- Help available if you are losing your hearing.

## **What causes people to become hard of hearing as they get older?**

Some people find it embarrassing or difficult to accept that they are becoming hard of hearing. In fact, it is a natural part of getting older. One in five of all adults, and more than *half* of people over 60, have a hearing loss.

If you are under 60 and you think you have developed a hearing loss, it is very important to see your doctor about this. It is less likely to be presbycusis and you should have your ears and your hearing looked at.

Presbycusis is caused by the loss of tiny hair cells in the cochlea – the part of your ear that processes sounds for your brain to interpret. As you grow older, the hair cells begin to die and you will eventually notice that sounds are not as clear as they used to be.

If you have difficulty understanding what people say to you this may be the first sign that your hearing is not as good as it was. You may hear people talking but think they are mumbling or not speaking clearly. Most people with presbycusis notice the ‘high frequency’ sounds disappearing first. Speech sounds with the highest frequencies are the consonant sounds such as ‘s’, ‘sh’, ‘t’, ‘k’, ‘p’ and ‘f’. These sounds help us to make sense of speech.

So next time someone offers you a ‘big kiss’, make sure they are not really asking if you would like a *biscuit!*



**Do you have difficulty understanding what is being said in noisy places?**

## **Signs to watch out for**

Are any of these situations familiar?

- Do other people seem to mumble rather than speak clearly to you?
- Do people have to repeat things for you several times before you understand what they say?
- Do you have difficulty understanding what is being said in noisy places, such as pubs or restaurants, although other people manage to have conversations?
- When you are talking to people in a group, is it hard to keep up with the conversation?
- Do you find it tiring to listen to conversations because you have to concentrate hard?
- Do other people think your television or music is too loud but you cannot hear it properly if they turn it down?
- Do you often have difficulty hearing on the telephone?

If any of these do sound familiar, it is possible that you have a hearing loss.

## Seeing your doctor

The thought of losing your hearing can be worrying. You might not want to think about it at all, but the sooner you do something, the better.

Your first step is to visit your GP (family doctor) to have your ears examined. Before you go make a note of your reasons for thinking you have a hearing loss. Use the checklist we have given to help you think of times when you have had difficulty hearing. Describe your hearing loss to your GP and explain how you feel it affects your day-to-day life. You may have to stress how the problems you are having with your hearing are affecting your life. You should also explain that you would like to know if something can be done to help you.

Your GP may be able to carry out simple tests with a tuning fork, or you may be able to have your hearing tested at the surgery. Usually you will be referred to the audiology clinic or ear, nose and throat (ENT) department of your local hospital.



**Visit your GP  
if you are  
worried about  
your hearing**



**MP Tony Benn  
says his two  
hearing aids  
help a lot**

## **The hearing tests**

When you get to the hospital for your hearing tests you will see a specialist called an audiologist.

The audiologist will look in your ears using an instrument called an otoscope before testing your hearing.

The hearing tests – also called audiometry – last about 20 minutes. The audiologist will ask you to put on headphones and listen to tones – these sound like beeps – at different pitches, first in one ear, then in the other. You have to press a button each time you hear a tone. The audiologist will make the tones gradually quieter to find out the softest sounds you can hear at each pitch.

The audiologist might also make the tones louder to find out the level when they become uncomfortable for you to listen to. This gives important information and helps with setting up your hearing aid.

# Want to know more?

This leaflet is available in audio tape, braille and large print.

We can also send you more information on many of the subjects covered in this leaflet. Just tick the boxes below, tell us what you particularly need to know about, or see our website at [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)



## ***Please send me:***

*Losing your hearing as you get older –*

- Audio tape     Braille     Large print

*Losing your hearing as you get older –*

- Bengali     Chinese (traditional)     Gujarati  
 Hindi     Punjabi     Urdu

The RNID Publications Catalogue.

Information about RNID Typetalk and BT TextDirect.

Details of RNID communication services in my area.

A copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue, giving details of equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.

RNID's fundraising leaflet. RNID relies heavily on donations from individuals, companies, trusts and fundraising events. Our leaflet shows how *you* can help.

Other information – please tell us what you would like to know.

(PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY, USING BLOCK CAPITALS)

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Pull out this section  
and return it to RNID

**Please fill in your name and address details overleaf.**

**Please send this information to:**

(PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY, USING BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Textphone \_\_\_\_\_

Your contact details will be held on our database so that occasionally we can send you information on our work. Please tick this box if you do not wish your details to be kept on our database.

We will use any information you give below to help us tailor our services to your needs. You do not have to give this information, but if you do, please tick this box to confirm we may keep it on our database.

***Tick all boxes that apply***

**Is the information:**

- For you
- For a friend or family member
- A professional enquiry

**How would you describe yourself?**

- Profoundly/severely deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Hearing
- Hearing aid user
- I have tinnitus
- I have balance problems

**Are you?**

- At school or below school age
- A student       Working age
- Retired

**If we could provide them, which of these formats would you like this leaflet in?**

- Videotape in sign language and with subtitles
  - E-mail/website
  - Face-to-face information
  - Another language (not English; please say which)
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to: RNID Information Line, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL or order from our website at [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**

# Stay informed

The information and advice you have received in this leaflet does not stop here!

By joining RNID you will receive our bi-monthly lifestyle magazine **One in Seven**, so you need never miss out on all the latest news, views and products related to deafness and hearing loss.

But that's not all! RNID members also receive:

- **A Welcome Pack** detailing RNID services and publications.
- **10% discount** on all RNID priced publications.
- **A £5 voucher** when you join that you can use if you spend more than £50 on equipment from RNID Sound Advantage.
- In-depth **supplements** such as *Inspirations*.

## How to join

By **post** using the form overleaf.

By **telephone** or **textphone** on 020 7296 8049.

**Online** at [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

**Join today!**

**Fill in the form overleaf to benefit.**



## Yes, I want to stay informed by becoming a member!

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS)

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Textphone \_\_\_\_\_

**Please accept my payment:** *(tick relevant boxes)*

**£17.99 Standard rate**

**£10.99 If you are retired, unwaged or a full-time student**

**I would like to make a donation of £ \_\_\_\_\_**

**I enclose a cheque/PO made payable to RNID** *(delete as appropriate)*

**I prefer to pay by MasterCard/Visa/CharityCard/Switch/Delta**  
*(delete as appropriate)*

Card number 

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Switch issue no 

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_

Please treat all my membership payments and/or donations from 6 April 2000 until further notice as Gift Aid. (This will increase the value of your membership fee to RNID by almost a third, with no extra cost to you.)

*NB To qualify for Gift Aid, I understand that I must have paid an amount of Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax equal to the tax RNID reclaims on my donations and/or membership payments.*

Please return this form to RNID, FREEPOST LON13186, London EC1B 1AL

Occasionally RNID will send you information on our work, please tick this box if you would prefer not to receive this.  Occasionally we will allow other organisations to contact you, please tick this box if you would prefer not to be contacted.

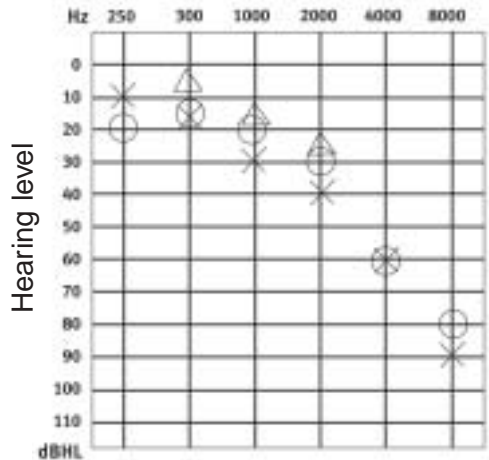
## Pitch of sound

If your hearing test shows that you have a hearing loss, you will be asked to put on a headband with a vibrating pad. This pad transmits sound through the bones of your skull to your cochlea in your inner ear on both sides of your head.

While you listen for tones from the vibrating pad, the audiologist might play a rushing noise into one ear to cover up the tones on that side while your other ear is tested.

The results of the tests are drawn on a chart called an audiogram. When the results of this test are compared with the headphone test, it shows up any problems you might have with your eardrum or middle ear. This helps to decide what can be done about your hearing loss.

You may be given another test where you will be asked to listen to sentences or words and repeat what you hear. This shows how much your ears are distorting sounds.



**The results of the tests are drawn on a chart called an audiogram**



**The RNID  
Information  
Line can give  
you further  
information  
about hearing  
aids**

## **If you do have a hearing loss**

The audiologist will explain your test results and discuss whether a hearing aid is likely to help you, or if there is some other treatment you could have. Occasionally, you will be offered further tests.

### **Getting used to a hearing aid**

If you are advised to try a hearing aid, it is a good idea to do so. It takes time to get used to using one because you have to become familiar with the sounds you hear, so the sooner you start the better.

### **Hearing therapists**

If you have your hearing tested, you should also ask if it is possible to see a hearing therapist.

Hearing therapists advise and support people who have a hearing loss. They can offer you a lot of practical suggestions on coming to terms with a hearing loss, getting the most out of a hearing aid, and tips for communicating with other people.

### **Local support groups**

Your audiology clinic or local library should be able to tell you about local support groups.

### **Lipreading classes**

Many people who have lost their hearing get a great deal from joining a lipreading class. Ask your local library or education department for details or contact the RNID Information Line.

### **Further information about hearing aids**

The RNID Information Line can give you information about hearing aids. Have a look at our leaflet *All about hearing aids*. We also have a range of factsheets you might find useful including *Buying a hearing aid?*, *Digital hearing aids* and *The NHS hearing aid service*.

### **There is always help available**

Remember that you do not have to hide or put up with a hearing loss. It should not stop you from socialising or make you feel left out of conversations. You may find that you need to learn some new skills, and that you have to assert yourself sometimes, for example by reminding people to face you and to speak clearly. Remember that there is always help available.

## Equipment to help you

There is a range of equipment that you might find useful if you have developed a hearing loss, whether you use a hearing aid or not. You could try a telephone amplifier to use with your existing telephone or get a new telephone specially designed for hard of hearing people. You can get equipment to let you know when your telephone, doorbell or alarm clock is ringing or to draw your attention to your smoke detector or baby alarm. Listening equipment can help you hear the television, radio, stereo or conversation. If you want to get the most out of your television, video or DVD player you can find out more about subtitles.

### Further information

Contact the RNID Information Line for information about equipment.

Tel: 0808 808 0123. Textphone: 0808 808 9000.

Fax: 020 7296 8199.

E-mail: [informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk)

Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

You can also visit the RNID Shop at [www.rnidshop.com](http://www.rnidshop.com) to buy equipment online.

Alternatively, send off for a copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue.

Tel: 01733 232607. Textphone: 01733 238020.

Fax: 01733 361161.

E-mail: [solutions@rnid.org.uk](mailto:solutions@rnid.org.uk)

## What is RNID?

**RNID is the largest charity representing the 8.7 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. As a membership charity, we aim to achieve a radically better quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing people. We do this in the following ways:**

- Campaigning and lobbying to change laws and government policies.
- Providing information and raising awareness of deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus.
- Training courses and consultancy on deafness and disability.
- Communication services including sign language interpreters.
- Training of interpreters, lipspeakers and speech-to-text operators.
- Seeking lasting change in education for deaf children and young people.
- Employment programmes to help deaf people into work.
- Residential and community services for deaf people with special needs.
- RNID Tynetalk, the national telephone relay service for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Equipment and products for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Social, medical and technical research.

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This leaflet is part of RNID's **medical** range.

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*Some photographs in this leaflet were posed by models.*

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19-23 Featherstone Street  
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[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

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for deaf and hard of hearing people