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Guidelines on Hearing Loss		

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What is Deafness?

Deafness means that a person has a limited ability to hear sounds. It is a communication difficulty rather than merely a loss of sound perception.

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Congenital deafness affects all aspects of a child's development: cognitive, emotional, social and educational.

Hearing Loss affects volume (loudness) and frequency (pitch).

Adults who become deaf (deafened) do not rely on hearing alone to communicate. Vision is also important.

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The terms mild, moderate, severe and profound describe the extent of deafness.

Signs of Hearing Loss

The signs of hearing loss can be subtle and emerge slowly, or they can be significant and come on suddenly. Either way, there are common indications.

Hearing loss is often classified by means of different levels. The same definitions are not always used, but the following are among the most common.

Mild

On average, the quietest sounds that people can hear with their better ear are between 25 and 40dB. People who suffer from mild hearing loss have some difficulties keeping up with conversations, especially in noisy surroundings.

Moderate

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are between 40 and 70dB. People who suffer from moderate hearing loss have difficulty keeping up with conversations when not using a hearing aid.

Severe

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are between 70 and 95dB. People who suffer from severe hearing loss will benefit from powerful hearing aids, but often they rely heavily on lip-reading even when they are using hearing aids. Some also use sign language.

Profound

On average, the quietest sounds heard by people with their better ear are from 95dB or more. People who suffer from profound hearing loss are very hard of hearing and rely mostly on lip-reading, and/or sign language. They may hear loud sounds.

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How We Hear

The ear is made up of three different sections: the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear. These parts work together so we can hear and process sounds. The outer ear, or pinna (the part you can see), picks up sound waves that then travel down the ear canal.

The following names and phrases are often used when people talk about communication.

Auralism

An approach to communication which concentrates on listening skills.

Bilingualism

The bi-lingual child is one who is learning and using two languages, whatever the level of achievement in the languages at any given point in time.

Body Language

All kinds of communication include body language. Facial expression, gestures with the hands, body posture, and rate of breathing are all examples of body language.

Communication

When we exchange information, we are communicating. Communication is concerned both with producing language and with being able to understand language.

Communication Skills

This is a very general term used to describe the skills needed for all kinds of communication. Sign, speech, lipreading and so on are all types of communication skills.

Cued Speech

Some words look very similar when they are lipread by deaf people but sound different to hearing people, e.g. pat and but. Cued speech uses one hand placed near the mouth and a variety of hand shapes to show the difference. It is always used with speech.

Fingerspelling

Each of the letters of the alphabet is represented by a different handposition. In Ireland, we use a one-handed version, but in the UK, most people use a two-handed alphabet.

Home Language

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This is the language which is used by the Deaf child's parents in the home.

Examples of home languages are English, Irish and Sign Language.

Irish Sign Language (ISL)

The sign language which is used by the Deaf community in Ireland. It uses gestures of the hands and the rest of the body including the face, and is a visual language both in the way it is used and in the way it is understood.

ISL is an independent language with a structure and grammar different from that of English. It cannot be used at the same time as spoken English.

Language

Language is something we use to communicate with other people.

Languages are a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces of the puzzle are the words, signs or non-verbal parts of the language. The way we put the pieces together is called the "grammar" of the language.

Language Environment

The language that surrounds and is experienced by children. Children absorb ways of using language from this environment, and also learn about the way language is structured. This is the basis of further language development.

Lipreading/Speechreading

When people speak, their lips make patterns. Lipreading or speechreading is the ability to read these patterns. It is easier to lipread if there is some "residual hearing" or if another system such as Cued Speech or Signed Supported English is used as well.

It is not possible to distinguish all the sounds of speech from each other by lipreading alone. A knowledge of the language is also extremely important for successful lipreading.

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Points to aid

Deaf people are those who have been born without hearing or have lost hearing in their early years

- Deafened people become deaf as adults usually after having acquired spoken language and their hearing loss is total or profound
 - Hard of Hearing people have a mild, moderate or severe hearing loss which may have developed gradually or suddenly
- 1.** Make sure you are in front of, or fairly close to (approx 3-6ft), and on the same level as the Deaf person.
 - 2.** Position yourself with your face to the light and avoid placing yourself in front of a bright window.
 - 3.** Check that background noise is kept to a minimum.
 - 4.** Do not shout.
 - 5.** Speak clearly, maintaining a normal rhythm of speech.
 - 6.** Remember that sentences and phrases are easier to understand than isolated words.
 - 7.** If a word/phrase is not understood, use different words with the same meaning - rephrase.
 - 8.** Allow more time for the person to absorb what you have said.
 - 9.** Keep head still and stop talking if you turn away.
 - 10.** Keep hands, pens, cigarettes etc., away from your face while speaking.
 - 11.** Do not eat while speaking.
 - 12.** Avoid exaggerated facial movements, grimacing or inappropriate facial expression.
 - 13.** Gesture can be helpful.
 - 14.** If the Deaf person is accompanied by a hearing person, avoid conversing only with the hearing person and ignoring the Deaf person.
 - 15.** Make sure the Deaf person is looking at you - attract attention if necessary.

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16. If the topic is changed, make sure the Deaf person knows.
17. The first or preferred language of many people who were born deaf is Irish Sign Language and they may need an interpreter. The interpreter should, ideally, sit next to the hearing person.
18. Check the Deaf person understands you.
19. Write things down if necessary.
20. Remember lipreading can be very tiring.

Hearing Aids

Behind the Ear (BTE)



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BTE aids have a small plastic case that fits behind the ear and conducts sound to the ear canal, usually through an earmold that is custom made. BTEs can be used for mild to profound hearing losses and are especially useful for children because of their durability and ability to connect to assistive listening devices. Their colours range from very inconspicuous skin tones for adults to bright colours and optional decorations for children.

In the Ear (ITE)



These devices fit in the outer ear bowl (called the concha); they are sometimes visible when standing face to face with someone. ITE hearing aids are custom made to fit each individual's ear. They can be used in mild to some severe hearing losses.

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In the Canal (ITC)



ITC aids are smaller, filling only the bottom half of the external ear. You usually cannot see very much of this hearing aid when you are face to face with someone. Mini Canal (MIC) and completely in the Canal (CIC) are even smaller and often not visible unless you look directly into the wearer's ear. These aids can be used for mild to moderately-severe losses.

Cochlear Implant



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A cochlear implant (CI) is a surgically implanted electronic device that can help provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing. The cochlear implant is often referred to as a bionic ear. Unlike hearing aids, the cochlear implant does not amplify sound, but works by directly stimulating any functioning auditory nerves inside the cochlea with electrical impulses, giving people an electronic sensation of some sounds.

External components of the cochlear implant include a microphone, speech processor and transmitter.

Hearing Aid Care

If your hearing aid is not kept clean, it will require repairs more frequently.

- Keep your hearing aid clean at all times.
- When handling your hearing aid, be sure your hands are clean.
- Before going to bed at night, clean your hearing aid.
- If there is any earwax or other debris on the hearing aid or ear mould, wipe it with a soft, dry tissue.
- A wax-loop and wax-brush should be used for cleaning the canal portion of your hearing aid.



Example of wax-loop and one type of brush.



Clean canal portion of hearing aid.



Put hearing aid in case with battery compartment OPEN.

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Keep case closed.

When you are not using your hearing aid, store the case with the battery compartment open.

- Do not store your hearing aids in your pocket. You may lose them!

Store your hearing aid in a cool, dry place.

- A dresser drawer or nightstand drawer is recommended.

Keep your hearing aid away from children and small animals.

- Dogs and cats WILL eat or destroy your hearing aid.
- If your hearing aid is stored in its case, animals will not be able to access it.

Keep your hearing aid dry.

- Do not wear your hearing aid while bathing, swimming, or shaving.
- Do not use water or cleaning solutions on your hearing aid.
- Wear a hat or umbrella if it is raining or snowing.
- If your hearing aid gets wet and stops working:
 - Remove the battery and throw it away.
 - Place your hearing aid in the storage case and let it dries overnight.

Do not try a new battery until the next morning.

- Protect your hearing aid from extreme temperatures.
- Do not use a hair dryer on your hearing aid.
- Do not store hearing aid in direct sunlight, in a glove compartment, on a stove, or on a radiator.

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Weather may affect your hearing aid.

- In extreme cold, your hearing aid may make 'popping' noises and then stop working. This happens when the battery becomes too cold. Your hearing aid should begin working once you return indoors and it 'warms up'. On hot/humid days, your hearing aid may stop working if sweat plugs the canal.

Do not drop your hearing aid.

- Insert and remove your hearing aid over a carpeted area. If you do not have carpeting, insert your hearing aid while sitting on a bed. If you choose to insert your hearing aid over a table, place a bath towel on the table beforehand.

Protect your hearing aid from harsh substances.

- Do not wear your hearing aid while using hair spray, spray paint, or any other sticky sprays. This will clog the microphone.

Do not use your hearing aid while using noisy machinery.

- Do not wear your hearing aid when you are using a lawnmower, power tool, chainsaw, tractor or a shotgun/rifle.
- Remove the hearing aid - hearing protection (earplugs/ear muffs) should be worn instead. Loud noise can cause your hearing loss to worsen.

If you have an ear infection with discharge, do not wear your hearing aid.

- Contact your physician for medical treatment.

If your hearing aid stops working, please refer to the troubleshooting guide.

- Never grind or poke holes in your hearing aid. Never take your hearing aid apart.

If your hearing aid is causing you pain/soreness:

- STOP wearing your hearing aid, and make an appointment with your hearing aid provider.

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- Start wearing your hearing aid again the day before your appointment. This will help the hearing aid provider see where you are experiencing the soreness.

Hearing Aid Batteries

A small battery is the power source for your hearing aid and requires replacement every one to three weeks.

How often you change your batteries varies with the degree of hearing loss, the number of hours you wear your hearing aid(s), and the type/size of the battery.

- Keep batteries out of reach of children and pets.
- Do NOT put batteries in your ears, nose, or mouth. Always dispose of old batteries.
- Some individuals have mistaken small batteries for medication. Please check your medication before swallowing.
- If you swallow a battery, contact your GP immediately.
- Store batteries in a cool/dry place.
- Do NOT store zinc-air batteries in a refrigerator.
- When replacing the battery, do not force the battery door closed.
- Check to make sure the battery is the correct size and in the right way.
- When your hearing aid is not in use, open the battery compartment; this will save battery power and allow the hearing aid to dry overnight.
- Keep the 'tab' on zinc-air batteries until you are ready to use them.
- Extra batteries should be carried in a cloth or leather pouch.
- Do NOT carry batteries loosely with other metal objects (coins, keys, etc.). If metal objects rub together, it could kill the battery.

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- Never dispose of batteries in a fire - they may explode.

Replacing your Battery

- LEFT: In-the-ear RIGHT: Behind-the-ear
- Open the battery door - by swinging the door open with your finger.
- Take out the old battery.
- Peel the 'tab' off the new battery.
- Hold the battery between your thumb and forefinger with positive (+) side up (this is the all silver side).
- Slide or push into the battery door. Do not place the battery directly inside the hearing aid itself.
- Close the battery door.

The circle on the negative side (-) of the battery should line up with the ledge on the bottom of the battery compartment.