

Communicating with the Hearing Impaired:

Facts about Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is a major public health issue. It is the third most common physical condition after arthritis and heart disease.

- ❖ Approximately 48 million people report some degree of hearing loss.
- ❖ Four out of five Americans with hearing loss do not wear a hearing aid.
- ❖ 18% of adults 45-64 years old have hearing loss.
- ❖ At age 65, one out of three people has hearing loss.
- ❖ 47% of adults 75 years or older have hearing loss.
- ❖ Tinnitus (ringing in the ears) affects 50 million people in the United States.
- ❖ 60% of veterans who serve in combat experience noise-induced hearing loss. Hearing loss and tinnitus are the most common service-related disabilities.

Being Hard of Hearing or Deaf May:

- ❖ Compromise awareness and safety.
- ❖ Increase fatigue, tension, irritability, and stress.
- ❖ Reduces a patient's ability to understand, remember, and respond to information.
- ❖ Impact other health and safety issues such as falls, cognitive decline, and dementia.
- ❖ Contribute to low self-esteem.
- ❖ Create or increase a sense of isolation.
- ❖ Increase the patient's risk for depression.
- ❖ Adversely affect overall quality of life.

Approach

Approach the client from the front or side so they can see you and gently touch their arm or shoulder to avoid startling them. Proper lighting on your face helps the client see you clearly, which aids understanding. Ensure the client's glasses are clean and worn if needed.

Background Noise

Lower the volume on TVs and radios, and close doors to reduce background noise. The less noise there is, the easier it is for the client to understand you. Remember that hearing aids amplify all sounds, including alarms, phones, and conversations. Always face the client when speaking, talk clearly, and speak loud enough for them to hear, avoiding talking from another room or with your back turned.

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Hearing Aids

If a client uses hearing aids, keep them clean and within reach. Assist with adjusting the volume, as setting it too high can cause loud, uncomfortable sounds.

Sign Language

Sign language, facial expressions, and lip reading can help clients understand. Using a notepad and pen or pencil is also effective. For best results, write clearly with a black marker, making letters bold and easy to read—the darker, the better.

Speaking

Face clients with hearing loss, maintain eye contact, and keep your mouth visible. Speak clearly, use simple words, and avoid yelling or talking down. Rephrase if needed, minimize distractions, and use communication aids like gestures, notes, hearing aids, or pictures.

Speak Clearly and Slowly

Speak clearly and at a slightly lower pitch without yelling. Adjust your voice to the client's hearing needs, pronounce numbers individually (e.g., 67 as "six seven"), and stay focused on one topic to avoid confusion.

Using an Interpreter

If a client is using an interpreter, always speak directly to the client, as you are communicating with them.