

## Q&A

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: I have trouble understanding people at parties and in restaurants. Am I going deaf?**

**A:** No—hearing loss is *not* the same as deafness. There are many options to help you hear and understand better. It starts with a hearing test.

**Q: But I always used to have great hearing.**

**A:** Your hearing loss could be age-related. More than a third of people aged 65+, and more than half of people aged 75+, have some sort of hearing loss.

**Q: My hearing loss is not that bad. Shouldn't I wait until it gets worse?**

**A:** It's best not to wait. The longer you wait, the harder it is for your brain to get used to hearing aids and to re-learn certain sounds. Remember the old adage: Use it or lose it!

## TIPS & RESOURCES

### Things You Can Do

- Talk to your health care provider
- Get a hearing test
- Don't delay getting help

### Things Family and Friends Can Do

- Discuss hearing loss as a family
- Give encouragement and support
- Emphasize that it's a family affair

### Things Everyone Can Do

- Use effective communication strategies
- Protect your hearing in noisy environments
- Choose settings that are "hearing friendly"

## Resources

**Hearing Loss Association of America**  
[hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org) • 301-657-2248

**National Council on Aging**  
[ncoa.org/HearingLoss](http://ncoa.org/HearingLoss)

**National Institute on Deafness & Other Communication Disorders**  
[nidcr.nih.gov](http://nidcr.nih.gov) • 301-496-7243

**Foundation for Sight and Sound**  
[foundationforsightandsound.org](http://foundationforsightandsound.org)  
631-366-3461

UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION®  
[www.unitedhealthfoundation.org](http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org)

**ncoa**  
National Council on Aging

[www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org)  
[www.facebook.com/NCOAging](http://www.facebook.com/NCOAging)  
[www.twitter.com/NCOAging](http://www.twitter.com/NCOAging)

### A Personal Appeal

"I've had hearing issues my whole life. But with hearing aids that have been properly fitted, I've been able to lead a full professional and personal life. I encourage you to find out how the right treatment can do the same for you."



**James Firman, EdD,**  
**President and CEO**  
National Council on Aging

## Hearing Loss It's a Family Affair

Stay in the conversation  
Stay involved with the  
people you love



A RESOURCE GUIDE FROM THE

**ncoa**  
National Council on Aging

UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION®

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**“It’s his hearing loss, but it’s *our* problem.”**

## How do I know if I have hearing loss?

Age-related hearing loss often comes on slowly, so it can be easy to miss. People often think that other people are just “mumbling.” Here are some warning signs to look for:

- Always turning up TV or radio volume
- Problems hearing on the telephone
- Cupping hand to ear or leaning closer in conversation

## Hearing loss can be hard on relationships

Hearing loss can be exhausting and frustrating. It can mean misunderstanding words or saying the wrong thing. People with hearing loss may give up struggling to listen, and their spouses, children, grandchildren, and friends may stop talking to them.

Untreated hearing loss can cause isolation and depression. It can also hurt the emotional and physical health of the spouse, particularly a wife. In some cases, it can even lead to divorce. Sex life can also be affected.

## What causes hearing loss?

In age-related hearing loss, hair cells in the inner ear that carry sound waves to the brain become less sensitive over time.

Sounds become distorted. Certain letters become hard to hear and hard to tell apart, such as S, T, and P. So the word “time” might sound like “dime.” High-pitched sounds, like a woman’s or a child’s voice, are harder to hear.

Hearing loss can be caused by:

- Aging
- Exposure to noise
- Damage to the auditory nerve
- Infection
- Ear wax build-up
- Changes in the blood supply to the ear because of heart disease, high blood pressure, or diabetes
- Head injuries or tumors
- Side effects from some medicines, including aspirin and some antibiotics

## It’s important to get help

Start with a hearing test. Ask your health care provider to check for ear wax build-up, which can impair hearing.

Your health care provider can help you determine your best options. While hearing aids cannot restore normal hearing, more than 90% of people with hearing loss can benefit from hearing aids.

**Explore more facts of hearing loss for older adults at [ncoa.org/HearingLoss](https://ncoa.org/HearingLoss).**

Hearing aids work by amplifying the kind of sounds that are hardest to hear. Thus, when you start wearing hearing aids, you may notice that sounds will sound different. Be patient while your brain gets readjusted with hearing the sounds you have been missing.

Special telephones and TVs, radio listening systems, and other amplifying systems also can help. Safety is also an issue—consider whether you need a special smoke alarm that you can hear.

Using effective communication strategies and choosing settings that are “hearing friendly” could make listening easier. For example, close the distance between you and the speaker. Choose restaurants that are relatively quiet, and go at times that are less busy. Choose a table along a wall or in a corner, which will cut down distracting background noise.

