



Let's talk hearing

For many of us, hearing loss isn't something we have a lot of experience with. But like other health conditions, it helps to better understand hearing loss and know how to talk about it— whether the person with hearing loss is you, a friend or family member, or a coworker.



Using the right language

Just like other aspects of physical and mental health, there are preferred ways of talking about hearing. Using the right language is important because it shows respect for those with hearing loss and demonstrates that you understand their condition.

Phrases not to use ¹	Preferred phrases ¹
Hearing impaired (suggests a person is limited by their disability)	Hearing loss/person with hearing loss
The hard of hearing	People who have hearing loss
Disabled (suggests that people are defined by their disability)	People with disabilities (puts people first before the disability)



Types of hearing loss²

There are 3 main types of hearing loss. They are determined by the part of the ear which has damage—the outer, middle or inner ear.

- 1. Conductive hearing loss** – happens when sounds cannot get through the outer and middle ear
- 2. Sensorineural hearing loss** – happens after inner-ear damage
- 3. Mixed hearing loss** – a combination of conductive and sensorineural loss

Degree of hearing loss²

Hearing loss can vary from person to person. The amount of hearing loss a person has is determined by how many **decibels** (a measure of loudness) a sound must be in order to hear it.

Degree of hearing loss	Hearing loss range (decibels)
Normal	-10 to 15
Slight	16 to 25
Mild	26 to 40
Moderate	41 to 55
Moderately severe	56 to 70
Severe	71 to 90
Profound	91+

Learn more—For a comprehensive list of hearing terms, view the Hearing Loss Association of America’s [glossary of definitions](#).

Talking to a doctor about hearing health

If you or a loved one may have hearing loss, it’s important to schedule a doctor visit as soon as you notice symptoms. Many people wait too long. The average hearing aid user waits 10 years before getting help for hearing loss,³ which can result in communication issues or other health concerns.

Prepare for your visit by creating a list of your symptoms and how long you’ve had them. In addition, you’ll want to include key medical information, especially related to any ear problems. This includes jobs you’ve had in the past that exposed you to high noise levels.

Questions to ask your doctor include:⁴

- What’s the most likely cause of my symptoms?
- What else might be causing my symptoms?
- What tests do you recommend?
- Should I stop taking any of my current medications?
- Should I see a specialist?

Questions your doctor may ask you include:⁴

- How would you describe your symptoms?
- Do you have pain or drainage in the affected ear or ears?
- Did your symptoms come on suddenly?
- Do you have ringing, roaring or hissing in your ears?
- Do your symptoms include dizziness or balance problems?
- Do you have a history of ear infections, ear trauma or ear surgery?
- Have you ever worked in a job that exposed you to loud noise?
- Does your family complain that you turn up the TV volume too high?
- Do you have trouble understanding someone talking in a low voice?
- Do you have trouble understanding someone on the phone?
- Do you often need to ask others to speak up or repeat themselves? Does this happen more often in a noisy setting, such as a crowded restaurant?

Discussing hearing loss with your family

When 1 person has hearing loss, it affects the entire family. Open communication is key in helping to make sure everyone is on the same page. Whether you're revealing your own hearing loss or talking to family members about theirs, here are a few things to remember.⁵

- ✓ **Explanation is important.** Hearing loss is difficult to understand for people who haven't experienced it, so explaining symptoms can help.
- ✓ **Emotions should be shared.** Being open with frustrations and sadness that surround hearing loss helps keep family relationships closer together.
- ✓ **Stigma needs to be broken.** When hearing loss is treated as a regular part of the family dynamic, people will become more comfortable addressing it.
- ✓ **A sense of humor doesn't hurt.** Miscommunication happens, but sometimes it can be amusing if not taken too seriously.

Having a conversation with someone who has hearing loss

Talking to someone with hearing loss may be challenging for those of us who aren't used to it. Be patient and compassionate. Here are a few tips on what to do—and not do—during conversation.

Do:^{5,6}

- Get a person's attention before speaking
- Face the person while speaking
- Limit background noise
- Keep your hands away from your face
- Speak naturally
- Rephrase rather than repeat misunderstood speech
- Use an app that translates spoken words into written words if needed
- When communicating with someone who has severe or profound hearing loss, create visual signals to indicate when you don't hear something

Do not:⁷

- Tell the person to turn their hearing aids up
- Say "Never mind" or "I'll tell you later"
- Become impatient or frustrated with the person
- Assume the person knows sign language
- Ask questions or start a conversation from another room

Continuing the conversation

Want to learn more about hearing loss and hearing health? The best place to start is by talking to your primary care doctor. Your doctor can help provide guidance and tell you if you need to see a hearing professional.

There are lots of great resources available online as well. Organizations such as the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) can provide helpful information.

You can also learn more about hearing health and options for care by calling UnitedHealthcare Hearing at **1-855-523-9355, TTY 711**, or visiting **[UHChearing.com](https://www.uhc.com/hearing)**.



Think you or someone you know may have hearing loss?

UnitedHealthcare Hearing offers a quick and convenient online hearing test. The test can help determine if there's a need to see a professional for further evaluation and a hearing aid fitting. To take the test, visit **[UHChearing.com/test](https://www.uhc.com/hearing)**.

Questions?

Call UnitedHealthcare Hearing at **1-855-523-9355, TTY 711**,
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT or visit **[UHChearing.com](https://www.uhc.com/hearing)**

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¹ AARP. "Deaf? Hard of Hearing? Hearing Impaired? Be Careful What You Call Us." [aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2016/deaf-disabled-hearing-loss-kb.html](https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2016/deaf-disabled-hearing-loss-kb.html). Accessed April 2021.

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. "Types of hearing loss." [asha.org/public/hearing/types-of-hearing-loss/](https://www.asha.org/public/hearing/types-of-hearing-loss/). Accessed April 2021.

³ Johns Hopkins Medicine. "The Hidden Risks of Hearing Loss." [hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss). Accessed April 2021.

⁴ Mayo Clinic. "Hearing loss." [mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hearing-loss/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20373077](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hearing-loss/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20373077). Accessed April 2021.

⁵ The Hearing Journal. "How to Talk to Your Family About Hearing Loss." [journals.lww.com/thehearingjournal/fulltext/2020/03000/how_to_talk_to_your_family_about_hearing_loss.10.aspx](https://www.thehearingjournal.com/fulltext/2020/03000/how_to_talk_to_your_family_about_hearing_loss.10.aspx). Accessed April 2021.

⁶ Cleveland Clinic. "Hearing Loss: Tips to Improve Communication with People with Hearing Loss." my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/4050-hearing-loss-tips-to-improve-communication-with-people-with-hearing-loss. Accessed April 2021.

⁷ Hearing Like Me. "8 things not to say to someone with hearing loss." [hearinglikeme.com/8-things-not-to-say-to-someone-with-a-hearing-loss/](https://www.hearinglikeme.com/8-things-not-to-say-to-someone-with-a-hearing-loss/). Accessed April 2021.

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