

Pacific Regional Centre for Healthy Aging

Health Topics - Depression

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Hearing Loss

Hearing isn't just about your ears. Hearing loss can mean more falls, loneliness, strained relationships, depression, and problems with thinking and brain health.

Getting help with hearing can improve your whole life. You'll find it easier to communicate with friends, family, co-workers, health providers, and others. Going to restaurants and family gatherings, watching TV, and staying physically active—all this is likely to get easier.

These days, there are many types of help for hearing loss. Treatment can be matched to your situation and goals. It can involve exciting new technology like apps and devices. It can also be as simple as a conversation with a caring professional to learn a few helpful tips.

Experiencing Hearing Loss? You Are Not Alone

Globally, 65% of people over the age of 60 experience some level of hearing loss, according to the World Health Organization.

Hearing loss is a major global health challenge, and numbers will go up as the population ages. Currently, more than 1.5 billion people of all ages (close to one in five) around the world

experience hearing loss. Estimates say this number will rise to 2.5 billion by 2050—one in four people.

Treating Hearing Loss

Many people think treating hearing loss means one thing: get hearing aids and start wearing them. This isn't wrong, but it isn't the whole story.

Everyone experiences hearing loss differently. You need to understand the hearing loss you have and get help for your specific situation. This personalized approach is called *hearing rehabilitation*, or *audiologic rehabilitation*.

Audiologists are hearing rehabilitation specialists.

What can an audiologist do?

- **Talk with you to figure out what your goals are and what help you need**

Your support needs will depend on what you are struggling with. If you have trouble at your weekly bridge night, your audiologist can help you find a solution for that. If you're struggling to hear your spouse and friends, that might call for a different approach.

- **Make sure your hearing aids are right for you**

There are many types of hearing aids. Each person's device is designed and adjusted just for them. Not every hearing aid works for every person.

- **Help you use and take care of your hearing aids**

Modern hearing aids offer options such as specific settings for different environments. Your audiologist will help you learn to use these.

They can provide advice about getting used to your hearing aids. Often, the first few weeks or even months can be challenging as the brain adjusts to the new input. As well, they'll teach you how to keep your hearing aids in good condition.

- **Set you up with other helpful technology**

There's a whole world of technology to help people hear better, and it is improving all the time. An audiologist can figure out what's best for you and teach you to use it. Here are some examples:

Assistive listening devices make sounds easier to hear by bringing the sound directly to your ear. They also reduce background noise. For some people, an assistive listening device is the only technology they need.

This might be as simple as a telephone amplifier. It might be a device used in the classroom, theatre, or other big public space that captures the sounds of the presentation and transmits them to a personal speaker, headphones, or your hearing aids.

For instance, you could use a **pocket talker** to talk to a friend or health professional. This is a device about the size of a deck of cards that you can buy for \$100 - \$150. Or you could use a **remote microphone** that connects wirelessly to headphones or hearing aids. You place the device near what or who you want to hear, and it sends the sound directly back to your ears.

Closed captioning shows the words at the bottom of the screen while you're watching TV or your computer screen (e.g., when you are attending a Zoom meeting). Most newer TVs and online programs have a closed-captions option.

Speech-to-text technology translates spoken language into written language almost instantly. It is now freely available to anyone with a smartphone, thanks to [NALscribe](#), a free app that anyone can download and use.

For example, if you are in a restaurant, you can put a device in the centre of the table. It will capture the conversation so you can read the text on your personal screen as the conversation unfolds. It's also useful at doctor's appointments and when speakers are wearing masks. It is like a personal closed captioning app.

Alerting devices alert you to a particular sound, such as the doorbell, a ringing telephone, or a baby monitor. These devices use louder sounds, lights, or vibrations to get your attention.

- **Teach you simple ways to improve communication**

Your audiologist can help you let others know what you need. For instance, you can ask people to face you so you can see their lips and facial expressions. You can ask people to speak slower but not shout at you. You can ask questions when you do not understand.

Also, an audiologist can suggest ways to set up your home to make hearing and listening easier. This might mean moving furniture and adding lighting so you can see people. It could include adding carpets to keep other noises down.

As well, an audiologist can give you tips for going out into the world. Depending on what your typical activities are, your audiologist can help you make an action plan, find the right words to ask for what you need, and educate others. Sometimes group classes are available so people who are hard of hearing can share ideas and experiences.

- **Help your family and friends understand your hearing loss and support you**

Your loved ones don't know how you hear. The audiologist can help them understand. There are recordings and simulations that let others hear how people with hearing loss hear.

Your audiologist can coach people in your life. For example, they can explain why it is important to get your attention before beginning to talk, to face you when speaking, to choose quieter tables and quieter times of day when visiting restaurants and pubs, and more.

When to Get Your Hearing Tested

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all adults from the age of 50 be screened regularly for hearing loss. Screening should happen at five-year intervals until age 64, and then every one to three years.

Screening doesn't mean a full hearing test. It can begin with a single question from your primary care provider. The main question is whether your life is affected. Are you having trouble enjoying relationships and activities? Are people close to you asking you to get help with your hearing?

Further testing or action will depend on the answers to these questions. Screening can happen at your care provider's office, in a home care setting, or at a public facility such as a recreation centre. You can even screen your own hearing.

Home Hearing Tests

[hearWHO](#) is a free app created by the World Health Organization. It provides basic information about your hearing. This app takes just a few minutes. It displays results clearly and keeps a

record of your hearing status over time. You can send your results to a health provider of your choice. The results can guide further actions, if needed.

There are versions in English, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and Dutch. The English version is designed to be easy for non-native speakers. The app is also available as hearWHOpro for health workers.

Seeing a Health Professional

If have hearing loss, you will see one of the following professionals:

- **Audiologist**

An audiologist is a university-trained professional. They specialize in evaluating, assessing, and treating hearing loss and other hearing-related disorders such as tinnitus (ringing in the ears). They can test hearing, provide you with hearing aids, and offer other treatments. They will use a [hearing rehabilitation approach](#). [Click here to find an audiologist](#).

- **Hearing instrument practitioner**

A hearing instrument practitioner is a college-trained professional who can test hearing and provide you with hearing aids. [Click here to find a hearing instrument practitioner](#).

- **Ear, nose, and throat (ENT) doctor**

An ENT doctor specializes in diseases of the ear, nose, throat, and related concerns. They can treat hearing problems that need medications or surgeries. Your health practitioner will tell you if you need an ENT.

You can make an appointment with an audiologist or a hearing instrument practitioner without a referral.

If your hearing gets worse quickly (over 1 to 3 days) you should get emergency medical care right away.

Preventing Hearing Loss

Whether you hear just fine or you need assistance, there are things you can do to protect your hearing.

Don'ts

Don't put anything in your ear. No cotton buds, toothpicks, or sticks.

Don't ignore an ear that has pus or any fluid coming out of it. See a doctor.

Don't treat ear conditions with hot oil, herbal, or home remedies.

Don't swim or wash in dirty water.

Don't listen to very loud music or other noise for long periods.

Do's

Do wear ear protection in noisy situations at work and play.

Do minimize time spent in noisy situations. Take short breaks to help your ears recover and avoid long-term damage.

Do keep noise volumes down. If you are using headphones or earbuds, keep the sound below 80 decibels, or no more than 60% of maximum.

Do live a healthy lifestyle: stay physically active, eat healthy foods, drink moderately or not at all, don't smoke, and be socially active.

Do use your hearing. Much like your muscles, hearing benefits from regular workouts. Listen to music, radio, and podcasts, or study a new language.

Hearing Loss by the Numbers

83% of people in need of hearing aids are not using them

65% of the global population above the age of 60 experiences some degree of hearing loss

More than 1.5 billion people experience some degree of hearing loss

By 2050, it is estimated that some 2.5 billion—one in every four—people will experience hearing loss

Know Your Rights

Both British Columbia and Canada have legislation to support people with disabilities. Not everyone realizes that being mildly or moderately hard of hearing is a disability, but in terms of public policy, it is.

You can ask for help in public places like government offices, health care settings, churches, cultural venues, and educational settings. They are required to provide ways to include people with hearing loss.

For Caregivers

How to Communicate with Someone with Hearing Loss

Speak clearly and distinctly, but don't shout. Shouting makes lip reading harder.

Make sure they can see you. Make eye contact. Find a position where your face is well-lit. Don't try to carry on a conversation from another room.

Get rid of background noise. Turn off the TV, radio, and music. Don't talk while water is running. Suggest moving to a quieter place if that will help.

Be patient when you have to repeat something.

Learn about technology that can help with communication and participate willingly in using it.

Remember to include the person in group conversations.

Resources

[Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, BC Chapter](#)

1-866-888-2442 / 604-423-3247

info@chha-bc.org

This organization is dedicated to enhancing quality of life for persons with hearing loss. Their website is full of useful information. They provide

- Education
- Support for accessibility
- Webinars on topics like using assisted hearing technology, knowing your rights, finding employment, and COVID strategies
- A free downloadable kit to help people with hearing loss manage well in health care situations

[NALscribe](#), a free speech-to-text app that you can download on your phone, tablet, or computer. It will 'listen to' speech and immediately transform it into writing on the user's device. This is especially useful when the speaker is wearing a mask, which prevents lip-reading. Created by National Acoustics Laboratories, an Australian government-funded research and solutions-focused organization.

[hearWHO](#) is a free app created by the World Health Organization that lets you do a basic hearing test. The app takes just a few minutes. It displays results clearly and keeps a personalized track record of your hearing status over time. You can send your results to a health

provider of your choice. The results can guide further actions, if needed. There are versions in English, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and Dutch. The English version is designed to be easy for non-native speakers. The app is also available as hearWHOpro for health workers.

[Healthlink BC—Hearing Loss](#) and [Hearing Loss in Adults](#)

Read more about causes, types, and treatment of hearing loss.

Find an Audiologist or Hearing Instrument Practitioner

Contact the [College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of BC](#) for a list of audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners in your area. You can also visit <https://cshbc.ca/> to view the list online. 604-742-6380/enquiries@cshbc.ca