



Hearing Loss – Bringing Seniors Back into the Conversation (page 1)

Nearly one-third of people over the age of 65 are hard-of-hearing while nearly 50% of people over the age of 85 suffer from some form of hearing loss. Because hearing loss is usually a gradual process that begins in one's forties, it is commonly not recognized until it is significant. It is important to be able to recognize signs of hearing loss, have it diagnosed and treated.

Symptoms of hearing loss:

- Have trouble hearing over the telephone
- Find it hard to follow conversations when two or more people are talking,
- Need to turn up the TV volume so loud that others complain,
- Have a problem hearing because of background noise,
- Sense that others seem to mumble, or
- Can't understand when women and children speak to you.

Hearing loss in seniors can lead to others mistakenly thinking that seniors are confused, difficult or apathetic. Additionally, the senior may be embarrassed by the loss and resist seeking out medical help. The inability to fully communicate can lead to frustration and isolation.

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Use the following strategies to bring these seniors back into the conversation:

1. Make sure that you are looking at the listener and you are in a well-lit area.
2. Don't shout, this can often create increased sound distortion.
3. If there are 2 or more people present, make sure that only one person is speaking at a time.
4. Address them directly by saying their name before starting a conversation so they have time to focus.
5. Many people with hearing loss rely on lip-reading. Keep your hands away from your mouth and avoid smoking, chewing gum or eating while talking.
6. Slow down a little but not too much. A natural and unhurried rate of speech allows the hearing impaired person to capture more words, read lips and facial expressions.
7. If one ear is better than the other, make sure you are directing your speech to the better ear.
8. Hearing loss can include certain sound distortions. They may hear your voice but not be able to decipher certain words or pitches.
9. Minimize extra noise in the environment when have a discussion, like turning the TV or dishwasher off.
10. If possible, avoid having discussions in settings that may have sudden loud sounds like busy streets, near construction areas or near airports.
11. Depending on the level and type of hearing loss, certain words are almost impossible to understand, try re-phrasing the sentence or find a different word. Don't repeat the word or sentence over and over again.
12. Avoid sudden changes of topic. When the subject is changed, clearly state the new topic and look for acknowledgement before proceeding.
13. Write specific information, such as appointments, directions and schedules down, if you are talking over the phone, have them repeat the information back as many words and numbers sound similar.
14. Understand that illness or tiredness may affect any person's ability to follow a conversation.
15. If the listener looks confused, clarify that they understood what you were saying.

If you suspect hearing loss, see a doctor as soon as possible to determine the cause and treatments available. Remember to be compassionate about discussing the possibility of hearing loss with your loved one. It is important to be supportive regarding the options and opportunity for treatment. Motivation for the decision to seek treatment should be to increase their quality of life by providing the ability to participate in social interactions to the best of their ability.

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