



Managing Hearing Loss and Tinnitus during Covid-19



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How to use the pack

This pack acts as an introduction to D/deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus. Throughout the pack there are useful links highlighted in **blue**. Click on the word to follow the links.

Introduction

RNID (previously Action on Hearing Loss) is the national charity working to make life fully inclusive the **12 million** individuals who are **deaf**, have **hearing loss** or **tinnitus** in the UK today.

Hearing Loss is a life-changing condition that affects people 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Research points to the links between hearing loss and increased risk of social isolation, poor mental health, and early cognitive decline. Similarly, those with tinnitus often battle with feelings of isolation and anxiety.

For more information, please see our [Hearing Matters Report](#).

Why it matters:

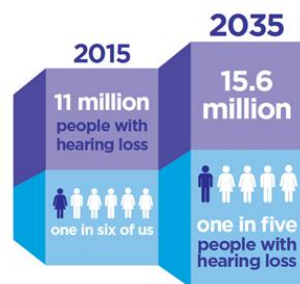
Hearing loss is a life-changing condition that affects people **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**. Research points to the links between hearing loss and increased risk of social isolation, poor mental health, and early cognitive decline. Similarly, those with tinnitus often battle with feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Face-to-face interactions are vital for **reducing isolation** for those with hearing loss, and ensuring they are able to communicate effectively with those around them. During these times when so many services are moving online or over the phone, it is key that individuals with hearing loss are able to continue to access services to reduce the risks of further isolation.

There are various levels of hearing loss, including profound deafness. Many of the **120,000** deaf individuals living in the UK today will use British Sign Language as their first language. Without access to resources and support in sign language they will miss out on vital information and can become more isolated.

These issues affect not only older people, but also those in the workforce who are now facing new challenges as the country continues to work remotely, as this [article](#) by the Guardian highlights.

For more information, please see our [Hearing Matters Report](#).



What is hearing loss?

Signs of Hearing Loss:

There might be many different signs that someone might have a hearing loss.

These are some of the more common ones.

- Finding it difficult to follow conversations in noisy places or in a group
- Having the TV or radio on very loudly
- Reporting that other people are mumbling
- Struggling to hear on the phone
- Asking others to repeat themselves
- Watching your lips when talking to you
- Appearing withdrawn or taking part less often
- Not responding when spoken to

There are a range of **causes of hearing loss** including wax, infection or disease, **noise exposure** or aging. **Age related** hearing loss is the single biggest cause of hearing loss, which is caused by the gradual wear and tear to tiny sensory cells called 'hair cells' in the cochlea (your hearing organ in the inner ear).



Let's Talk Tinnitus

Tinnitus is a noise in one or both ears that has no external source. People describe their tinnitus in lots of different ways e.g. ringing, buzzing, whistling or a range of other sounds. Tinnitus is very common and affects **1 in 8** adults across the UK of all ages.

At the moment there is no cure for tinnitus, however there are different strategies that can be adopted to manage it, including:

- Tinnitus clinic or support group
- Tinnitus retraining therapy
- Counselling
- Relaxation techniques
- Diet & exercise
- Complementary medicine
- Equipment, including tinnitus maskers
- Hearing aids



Tinnitus can get worse during times of stress or periods of change. Due to the changes to our lives that Coronavirus has caused, people may be struggling with their Tinnitus more than ever. However, with the right support, it can become more manageable.

For help and information, contact our Tinnitus helpline:

Call: 0808 808 6666

Text Message: 07800 000360 (text only)

Email: tinnitushelpline@hearingloss.org.uk

Or visit the [British Tinnitus association](#) for a wide range of information, resources and support and information about tinnitus in **isolation**.

Hearing Loss, Tinnitus and Mental Health

In these trying times, looking after our **mental health** and wellbeing is more important than ever. This is especially true for those who have hearing loss of any form; **1 in 2** people with hearing loss will struggle with their mental health during their lifetime, compared to **1 in 4** of the general public.

A blog by [NHS England](#) explains that it is not deafness or hearing loss itself that causes people to struggle with their mental health but instead the societal and cultural factors, such as communication and stigmatised attitudes towards deafness. Alongside this, isolation and loneliness can also contribute to mental health problems.

During this period of extended isolation, people with hearing loss will be experiencing loneliness and isolation more than ever. This is especially true where if the service they would normally access has moved to phone calls, a communication technique they may struggle with.

The main way that you can support the mental health of an individual with hearing loss and/or tinnitus at this time is to empathise with their situation. Trying to understand additional barriers they may be facing will help to reduce feelings of isolation, and validate people's concerns.

For more resources to support people with their mental health please see below:

Mental Health and Hearing Loss: [RNID](#) resources dedicated to mental health

Mental Health and Tinnitus: [British Tinnitus Association](#)

Mental Health support for BSL users (including a crisis text service): [Sign Health, Shout](#)

General resources about Mental Health and coronavirus

[Mind](#), [Mental Health Foundation](#), [Samaritans](#), [NHS Every Mind Matters](#)

Remote Communication

During this difficult period of social isolation, many services and social groups have had to move away from face to face interaction and instead move online, using videos and phone calls. For people who are D/deaf or have hearing loss, this be extremely isolating as many people cannot hear over the phone or lack the confidence to do so.

However, there are useful digital tools and communication tips that can be used to ensure phone and videos calls are accessible to all.

BSL Interpreting

For remote interpreting there are two ways to do it:

Video relay interpreting (VRI) – this is when all participants are in the same location (physical or virtual) and the sign language interpreter joins remotely using a video conferencing platform such as FaceTime, WhatsApp or Skype.

Video relay service (VRS) – this is when two parties in two separate locations are connected remotely via a sign language interpreter. You can make phone calls through specific service provider platforms, for example **SignLive**, **SignVideo** or **Interpreter Now**.



Text Relay

BT provides the only text relay system across the UK – its Relay UK system. Every communication provider is required to provide access to a text relay service under the Universal Service Obligation, which in effect means Relay UK. The system is required to answer over 90% of calls within 15 seconds, and 95% of emergency calls within 5 seconds.

Speech to Text apps

Speech to text (STT) apps can be very useful tools for more informal conversations. These are not regulated and therefore can't guarantee fast and accurate transcriptions and therefore should only be used for informal catch ups.

Remote captioning

Streamtext (this can be a full screen) – works with any platform

Letter box captions (looks like subtitles on your TV) – works with any platform. This is the best option for companies that want to have inclusive meetings and webinars, as everyone can see these subtitles and they work well with PowerPoint slides.

In-vision subtitles with Zoom or MS Teams – can be quite fast and not as easy to read as letter box captions.

Digital platforms

There are various different digital platforms available for video calls, and all offer some accessibility features. Please see for more information on each of the following:



Assistive equipment

There's a multitude of **different product options**, including:

- Amplified phones (landlines and mobile)
- Personal listeners
- TV listeners
- Tinnitus speakers
- Flashing doorbells
- Vibrating fire alarms, alarm clocks, and baby monitors



Amplified phones

Very useful for connecting with those who struggle to hear on the phone. Increased ring and in-call volume makes conversations easier. If you have decreased dexterity, there are options available with large buttons as well.

Personal listeners

A range of models available to suit different budgets and needs. Some models, such as those in Phonak's Roger range, can effectively block out background noise in loud areas, and focus on conversation instead. Others, such as those by Bellman, help to amplify sounds, which can be especially useful if your hearing aids are due an upgrade.

Do I need hearing aids to work with the products?

Some personal listeners and TV listeners work with the telecoil (also known as the T-loop or T-setting) programme on hearing aids, whereas others you can use with headphones. Headphones are normally sold separately.

Where to buy products

You can purchase a wide range of products from [Connevans](#). Sometimes products are offered VAT-free for hearing aid wearers.

If you are in full-time work, you can claim for products through the [Access to Work benefits scheme](#). Remember you can contact our Information Line with any further questions or queries on available products.

Communication tips

Always Ask: even if someone's using a hearing aid, ask if they need to lipread you.

Make sure you have the person's attention before you start speaking.

Find a place to talk that has good lighting, away from noise and distraction

Turn your face towards them so they can easily see your lip movements.

Keep your voice down: it's uncomfortable for a hearing aid user if you shout and it looks aggressive. you.

Get to the point: use plain language and don't waffle.

Speak clearly, not too slowly and use normal lip movements, facial expressions

Make sure what you're saying is being understood.

If you're talking to one person with hearing loss and one without, focus on them both

If someone doesn't understand what you've said, try saying it in a different way.

DEAF FRIENDLY PHONE CALL TIPS



Background noise
If possible, take the call somewhere with no background noise



Summarise
Summarise the conversation every 2 to 3 minutes



Check in
Check the person you're talking to is following the conversation



Phone call
Always ask if they are happy to talk over the phone



Re-phrase
If they don't understand what is being said, try to re-phrase



Interpreters
Ask if they would like someone else to talk for them



Don't shout
Keep your voice down. It is uncomfortable for a hearing aid user if you shout and it can appear aggressive



Text relay
Ask if they would prefer to use a text relay service or email



Get to the point
Use plain language, short sentences and don't waffle



Be clear
Speak clearly and not too slowly



Clear communication
Avoid using jargon and unfamiliar abbreviations



Check the volume
Can they increase the volume on their headset?

0845 685 8000
07537 410 086
rnid.org.uk

RNID

How can we help?

We can provide a wide range of information about [hearing loss](#), [hearing aids](#), [assistive equipment](#), [communication support](#) and much more.

Resources:

On our [website](#) we have a wide range of [leaflets](#) and factsheets. A range of leaflets are also available in easy read, large print and a selection of community languages.

For our specific [coronavirus](#) response please also see our website.

This information can provide a life line for those who are struggling with their hearing during this time of increased isolation, especially for those with unaddressed hearing loss.

For more information, please contact our national Information Line:

Call: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 900

Email: information@hearingloss.org.uk

Or Live Chat on our [website](#)

For information in BSL, you can book an appointment here: [BSL](#)

Or contact your local Information Officer:

Name: Hannah Schwemin

Email: Hannah.Schwemin@RNID.org.uk

Phone: 07918581020