



# Managing Hearing Loss and Tinnitus During Covid-19

## Content Page

What is Hearing Loss?	4
Let's Talk Tinnitus	5
Hearing Loss, Tinnitus and Mental Health	6
How We Can Help?	7
Support In Your Local Area	8
Leaflets	9
Remote Communication	10
Digital Tools	12
Deaf Friendly Phone Calls	13
Communication Tips	14

### 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

### Who We Are:

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the national charity supporting the **12 million** individuals who are [D/deaf](#), have [hearing loss](#) or [tinnitus](#) in the UK today.

Action on Hearing Loss exists to help people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. We enable them to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way.

### Why it matters:

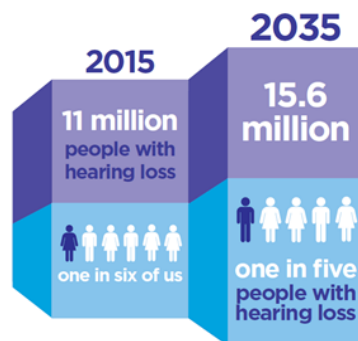
Hearing loss is a life-changing condition that affects people **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**. Research points to the links between hearing loss and increased risk of social isolation, poor mental health, and early cognitive decline. Similarly, those with tinnitus often battle with feelings of isolation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

There are a range of [causes of hearing loss](#) including wax, infection or diseased. [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).

### 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



## 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](mailto: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:** [Action on Hearing Loss's](#) 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](#)

## 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 fact-sheets. A range 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](mailto: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 Community Service Officer**

**Name:** Gill Drayson

**Email:** [Gillian.Drayson@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:Gillian.Drayson@hearingloss.org.uk)

**Phone:** 07570 670 643

## Support in your area

### Salisbury District Hospital, Audiology

01722 429335

[sft.audiology@nhs.net](mailto:sft.audiology@nhs.net)

Services available at the moment: All hearing aid repairs are being carried out remotely at present. Please contact the department by post, telephone or email. Only emergency face to face appointments are currently taking place although we hope to resume some routine appointments soon.

### Wiltshire Council Hearing and Vision Team

01380 826480

[hearingandvisionteam@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:hearingandvisionteam@wiltshire.gov.uk)

[www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)

During the covid-19 pandemic, we are continuing to take referrals as normal for information, advice and support on living with hearing and/or sight loss, dual sensory impairment and Deafness. We will work with you to discuss your sensory related concerns and priorities at this time to agree the most appropriate ways to meet the identified needs. Where the agreed course of action is a home visit public health England (PHE) guidance as regards appropriate levels of PPE will be followed.

## 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 [Sign-Live](#), [SignVideo](#) or [Interpreter Now](#).



## Remote Communication Cont.

### 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. Some useful STT apps are listed below:

- Google
- TextHear (Android)
- Speechnote (Android)
- Hearing Helper (iOS)
- Just press record (iOS)

### 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



Zoom

- Automatic video captions available
- Unlimited one to one video calls
- 40 minute limit on group video meetings with basic

- Limited live captions available on desktop app
- Audio, video and screen sharing activity can be recorded
- Automatic transcript allows user to play-back conversation and search within the transcript



Microsoft Teams

- Automatic video captions available
- Unlimited video meeting calls for up to 50 people with free package
- Works on phones, tablets and computers with webcams



Skype

- Automatic video captions available
- For video calls, phone calls and messages
- Video calls can include up to ten people



Google Hangouts



#LouderthanWords



A national charity since 1911

## Deaf friendly phone call tips



Always ask if they are happy to talk on the phone



Summarise the conversation every two to three minutes.



Would they like someone else to talk for them?



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



Would they prefer to use a text relay service or email?



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



Speak clearly and not too slowly



Keep your voice down: It's uncomfortable for a hearing aid user if you shout, and it can come across as aggressive.



Can they increase the volume on their handset?



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



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



Avoid using jargon and unfamiliar abbreviations.

Visit our Louder than Words website for more information about supporting staff and customers who are deaf or have hearing loss. [www.louderthanwords.org.uk](http://www.louderthanwords.org.uk)



## Communication tips for the general public

- Remember that people who are D/deaf or have hearing loss have individual communication needs and you should ask someone how best you can communicate with them. Not every tip below will be appropriate for every person who is D/deaf or has hearing loss.
- Be patient and considerate, it is a stressful time for us all, but people with deafness and hearing loss who rely on facial expressions and lipreading are finding things especially difficult right now.



The below are particularly important when someone cannot use visual cues, such as on the telephone or when wearing a mask:

- Make sure you are **facing the person** you are talking to and speak clearly – avoid shouting, speaking too fast or unnecessarily slow
- If someone doesn't understand you, **repeat what you said** or phrase it differently, use plain language
- In a noisy place, **move to a quieter area** if possible
- **Use simple gestures** such as pointing or waving to get someone's attention.
- **Write things down** – use pen on paper, text on device screens, or whiteboards
- If they ask, **speak to a relative or friend**



### Useful tools

- There are **live speech-to-text apps** available, though with varying levels of accuracy depending on background noise and speed of conversation.
- Utilise Video Relay Services, such as **InterpreterNow**, for British Sign Language users
- Use the **Sunflower or Hidden Disability Lanyard** available in some supermarkets and public spaces such as railway stations.

## General communication tips for someone with hearing loss

- Make people aware that you are deaf or have a hearing loss and your preferred communication style



Where lip reading is possible:

- Make sure they face you
- Make sure you can see their face clearly
- Make sure the person gets your attention before they start speaking
- Ask them to speak normally and not exaggerate their lip movements



The below are particularly important when someone cannot use visual cues, such as on the telephone or when wearing a mask:

- Ask them to **speak clearly**
- Ask them to **repeat or say things differently** if you do not understand what they have said
- **Reduce background noise** as much as possible by moving to a quieter space if possible
- **Use assistive devices** like remote microphones with hearing aids to improve the quality of speech over background noise
- **Write things down** – use pen on paper, text on device screens or whiteboards
- If possible, ask them to **speak to a relative or friend**

