

# CAN YOU HEAR ME?



Imagine if you awoke one day and realized that you could no longer hear your favorite songs, the sound of your grandchildren laughing, the nuances of your regular tv shows, or even inside jokes shared with your closest friends. Many of our loved ones start to experience this as they age, and it can cause them tremendous sadness and a feeling of loss. As hearing loss can come on slowly, they may not even be able to pinpoint why they feel so isolated and lonely.

Approximately one in three older adults have some level of hearing loss but many don't want to admit it, even to their loved ones. However, when someone can't hear well, they tend to withdraw from communications, to become depressed, and to self-isolate.

**When your loved one starts to pull back from communicating, it might not be obvious that hearing loss is the reason. Some things to look for to indicate that this might be their challenge:**

- An inability to accurately understand conversations over the phone, or an avoidance of talking on the phone altogether.
- Stress when trying to follow a conversation where two or more people are involved.
- Asking people to repeat what they are saying multiple times.
- Turning up the volume on TV or music to levels that cause others to complain.
- Withdrawal from loud social occasions.
- Complaints from your loved one that others mumble.
- More difficulty in hearing women and children. The most common level of hearing loss is in the higher registers.
- Their own speech becomes more mumbled or incoherent.

Source: [National Institute on Aging](#)



## How to Speak with Someone who is Hearing Challenged



- Choose places to talk where there is minimal background noise.
- Make sure to include your loved one in group conversations when they might be inclined to withdraw.
- Stand in good lighting and use facial expressions and gestures to help give context to what you're saying.
- Face the person and speak clearly.
- Speak a little louder but don't yell or enunciate abnormally.
- Do not hide your mouth, eat or chew gum while speaking.
- If you need to repeat yourself, use different words to express the same message.
- Be patient and positive.
- It is not rude to ask your loved one what might help them hear you better. Sometimes one ear hears better, or they read lips or a certain tone or volume works best for them.

Source: [National Institute on Aging](#)

One of the first indications of hearing loss might be tinnitus, or a ringing in the ears. If your loved one starts to complain about ringing, buzzing, hissing, or bells that no one else can hear, this may be what they are experiencing. While this is an early indicator of hearing loss, it can also be a sign of health problems such as high blood pressure, allergies or medication side effects. While it may seem a small complaint, it is certainly worth bringing to the attention of your loved one's health team.

In addition to the types of hearing loss that come with age, there are also other health conditions or medications that can contribute to the challenges.

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Ear infections
- Viruses
- Heart conditions
- Stroke
- Brain injury
- Some medications that treat infections, cancer, and heart disease
- Some antibiotics
- Potentially aspirin at higher dosages

Source: [National Institute on Aging](#)



## Treatment Options for Hearing Loss



Hearing aid(s).



Assistive devices, such as telephone amplifiers or technology that converts speech to text.



Training in speechreading through lip reading and body language.



Techniques for preventing excess wax in the outer ear.



If medications are causing the loss, finding new medications.

Source: [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)

## Dementia and Hearing Loss

The dangers from hearing loss in your loved one go far beyond the words that are missed. Hearing loss is one of the highest risks for development of dementia. Recent research has determined that brain atrophy happens more quickly in those with hearing loss.



Many of the symptoms are surprisingly similar. Both dementia and hearing loss are characterized by difficulty with communication, complications with completing simple everyday tasks, changes in the methods of communication, and increasing feelings of stress and fatigue. Because of this, hearing loss could be misdiagnosed as dementia and vice versa. It is important to look at both possibilities for your loved one to address their confusion appropriately.

Source: [The Hearing Journal](#)