



Managing Hearing Loss and Tinnitus During Covid-19

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How to use the pack

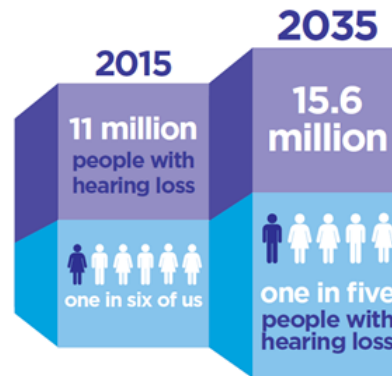
This pack acts as an introduction to D/deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus. Throughout the pack there are useful links highlighted in **blue**. **Click on the word to follow the links.**

Introduction

Who We Are:

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

RNID 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 too



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@rnid.org.uk

Or visit the [British Tinnitus association](https://www.british-tinnitus-association.org.uk/) for a wide range of information, resources and support and information about tinnitus in [isolation](https://www.british-tinnitus-association.org.uk/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'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 Matters](#)

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 un-addressed hearing loss.

For more information, please contact our national

Information Line:

Call: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 900

Email: information@rnid.org.uk

Or **Live Chat** on our [website](#)

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

For further resources and information, check our website:
www.rnid.org.uk

Support in your area

Or contact your local **Regional Information Manager:**

Name: Henry Skinner

Email: information.midlands@rnid.org.uk

There are local services that can provide support, advocacy, advice and hearing support. If you want to have information on local deaf services, deaf charity and audiology support, please contact our local Information service for further information.

Information and support during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

We are working hard to continue to help and support everyone who needs us during the coronavirus outbreak. The health and wellbeing of the people we support, our volunteers and our staff remains our priority.

We are also committed to making sure the government understands and responds to the needs of people who are deaf or have hearing loss in their response to the pandemic. [Find out more about our influencing work.](#)

For further information, please go to this link: <https://rnid.org.uk/coronavirus-response/>

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. There may be charges for the services, contact them for further information.

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](#).

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. You would need to download app, contact them or view their website for further information.



Remote Communication Cont.

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

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



Google Hangouts



Microsoft Teams



Zoom



Skype

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 [Connevens](#). 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.



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. [louderthanwords.org.uk](#)

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COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS

COVID-19 poses unique challenges for communication as many of those with hearing loss rely on visual cues, such as lipreading and facial expression.

This visual information is lost when someone is on a telephone or wearing a mask. Remote consultations on the telephone, or communicating with health and social care professionals wearing PPE, therefore, can be difficult or impossible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

The Equality Act requires reasonable adjustments to be made to support disabled people, including providing information in an accessible format.

The Accessible Information Standard puts a legal requirement on all health and social care providers to identify communication needs and provide information in people's preferred format. Accessible standards must be upheld, even in these unprecedented times.



Ask for and meet communication needs where possible

Our simple tips for health and social care professionals

Live captioning

Instead of using the telephone, where possible use video conferencing tools and add live captioning through video conferencing software.

Speech-to-text apps

There are live speech-to-text apps available, though with varying levels of accuracy. If these are used, understanding must be checked.

Video Relay

Utilise Video Relay Services, such as InterpreterNow, for British Sign Language users.

Audiology advice

Check if the person using your service is wearing a hearing aid and that it's working, if not, contact audiology locally for advice or a personal listener to amplify sound.

RelayUK

Utilise RelayUK for people with hearing loss.

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General communication tips

Where lipreading is possible:



Make sure there is adequate lighting.



Get the person's attention before speaking.



Face the person.



Use normal lip movements, facial expression and gestures

Where visual cues are not possible:

The below are particularly important when the person using your service cannot use visual cues, for example when you're on the telephone or wearing PPE:



Speak clearly

Avoid shouting or speaking unnecessarily slowly.

Re-phrase

Say things differently if people ask you to repeat what you've said or do not understand.

Repeat back

Check understanding by asking the person to repeat information back.

Clear language

Use plain language and be straight to the point.

Reduce noise

Reduce background noise as much as possible.

Write information

Where possible, also provide written information.

Interpreter

If requested, speak to a relative or friend.

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0845 685 8000



07537 410 086



communication.services@rnid.org.uk



rnid.org.uk/communicationsupport

Together, we'll make life more inclusive for deaf people and those with hearing loss or tinnitus.

RNID is the trading name of The Royal National Institute for Deaf People. A registered charity in England and Wales (207720) and Scotland (SC038926). A201012