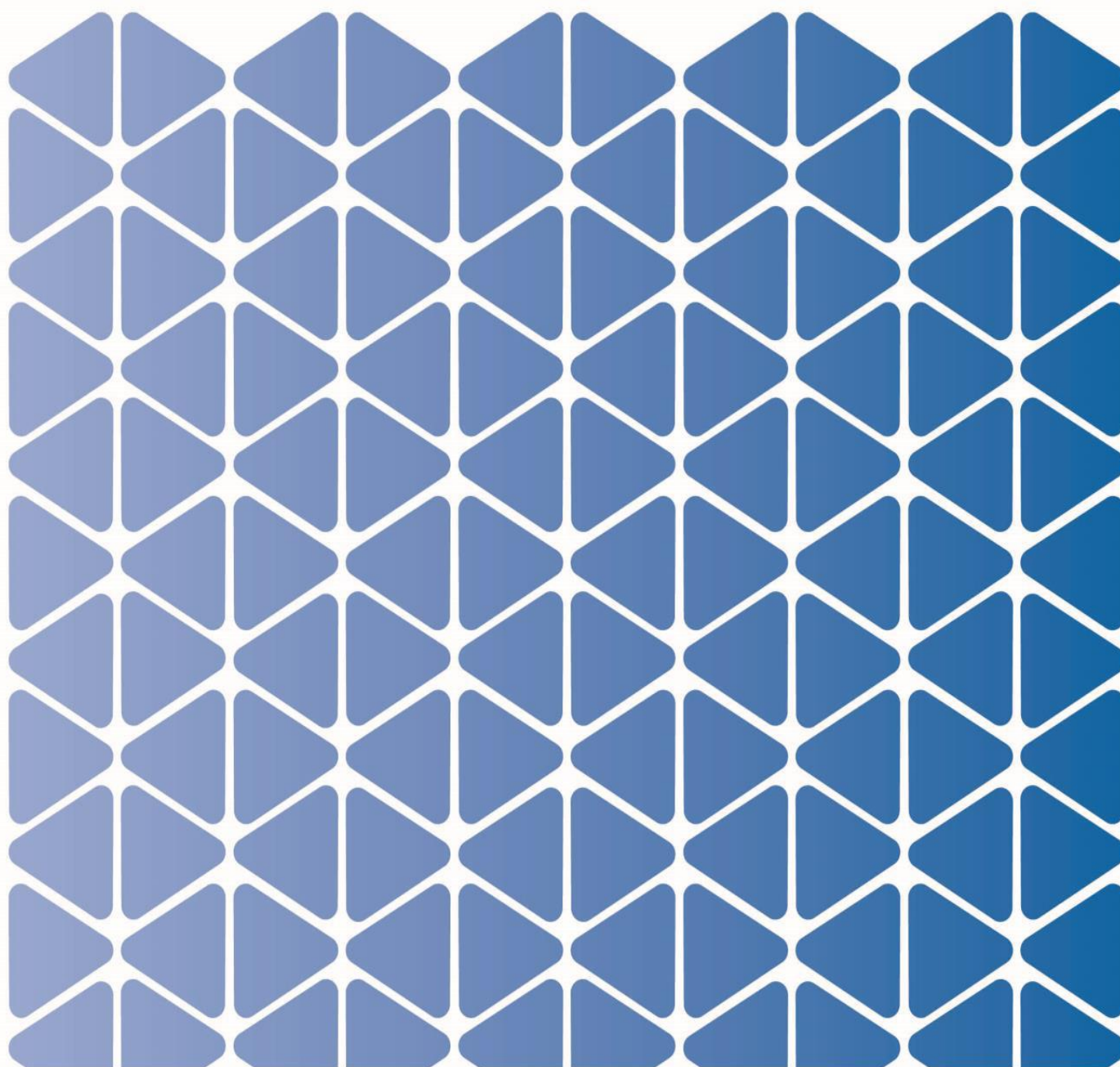


PATIENT INFORMATION

Help a Loved One to Better Hearing



How can I help?

If you are reading this leaflet, it is because you suspect that someone you care about might have a hearing loss and you want to help.

To do this, you need a clear idea of what it means to have a hearing loss. This includes how it affects family relationships, and the way people feel, behave and communicate.

Things are not easy with a hearing loss. It is difficult to converse in a crowded room or over the phone. It is not that things are not loud enough, but that they are not clear enough. Left untreated, hearing loss can affect the relationships between the person and their family and friends, quietly eroding their quality of life.

Types of Hearing Loss and their Causes

Age Related Hearing Loss

As we get older, some of us lose our ability to hear softer, high-pitched sounds. It may creep up slowly, but can eventually affect the person's ability to communicate.

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

This type of hearing loss is caused by overexposure to excessive sound levels. All over the world, people are encountering increasingly more sound.

Conductive Hearing Loss

Conductive hearing loss is caused by problems in the outer and middle ear. The most common cause can be a build up of wax in the ear canal, perforated eardrums, fluid in the middle ear, or damaged or defective ossicles. This can often be treated medically.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss

This type of hearing loss happens when the delicate sensory cells or nerve fibres of the inner ear get damaged. Common causes of sensorineural hearing loss are the natural process of aging, or excessive exposure to noise. This condition is in most cases permanent.

Recognising the Signs

These questions will help you to make a quick assessment of the hearing of a loved one.

- Do they complain that everybody seems to be mumbling?
- Do they have to strain to hear when someone talks?
- Do they find it hard to follow a conversation in meeting, restaurants or in lectures?
- Do they listen to the TV or radio at an abnormally loud level?
- Do they complain that people are mumbling when they talk on the phone?
- Do they tend to be more quiet than normal when socialising?

Only a hearing test can confirm hearing loss. Reassure your loved one by suggesting that you could accompany them to their initial consultation.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Gathering information is a great place to start. You can search the intranet for information on hearing loss and share it with your loved one.

The first step towards better hearing is to visit a hearing care professional for a hearing test. For an NHS referral, please see the GP.

A hearing assessment can take less than an hour and is completely painless. Since there can be a lot of information to digest, maybe offer to go along to the appointment.

The Hearing Test

If the hearing test shows signs of hearing loss, the next step is to find the right solution. Although hearing instruments can never totally restore a person's hearing, they can aid communication. Technology and the appearance of the hearing instruments have improved greatly over the years.

Adjusting to Hearing Instruments

During the first few weeks, it is important to wear the instruments as much as possible. As the brain starts to adjust, the benefits will become more obvious, and before long, your loved one will be wearing them all of the time.

What to expect

- Hearing instruments cannot totally restore a person's hearing.
- Even with hearing instruments, noisy situations can still be challenging.

- The adjustment period varies from person to person and can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days, weeks or months.
- Initially the volume might seem too soft or too loud. If it does, encourage them to have their instruments adjusted.

Communication is a Two-Way Process

Hearing instruments alone may not enable the person with hearing loss to communicate successfully in all listening situations. With the following tips, family members can do a lot to make listening and communicating easier.

- Gain the person's attention before speaking so that they have an opportunity to look at you and focus on what you are saying. Speak clearly and at a natural pace.
- Move closer and sit or stand where your face is well lit. This will help make your facial expressions and lips easier to read.
- Try not to talk while chewing.
- Never hide behind a newspaper or lean your cheek or chin on your hand while talking.
- Avoid talking from another room.
- If your loved one has difficulty understanding you, try rephrasing the sentence rather than just repeating yourself.
- In group situations, try not to interrupt each other.
- Reduce background noise i.e turn down the TV or radio.

When you are out and about

If you go to the cinema or theatre together, call in advance to check whether they provide assistive listening devices (systems that make it easier to listen with hearing instruments). When booking restaurants, try and find the quietest area to sit. Arriving at meetings or seminars early to enable seating near the front.

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If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.