

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

22nd September 2015 – Focus on Hearing Loss

Key facts you need to know about hearing loss

- In Northern Ireland 300,000 people are deaf, have a hearing loss or tinnitus. That is **one in six** of the population.
- 20,000 people are severely or profoundly deaf.
- Tinnitus severely impacts on the quality of life of at least 7,000 people.
- 42% of people aged 50 or over and 72% of people aged 70 or over have some form of hearing loss.
- Between 40 and 50% of older people with hearing loss have additional disabilities. It is similar with deaf children.

About hearing loss

Hearing loss is the result of sound signals not reaching the brain. We can distinguish between different levels of hearing loss – mild, moderate, severe and profound deafness. There are two main types of hearing loss, depending on where the problem lies:

- damage to the sensitive hair cells inside the inner ear or to the auditory nerve ('sensorineural hearing loss')
This occurs naturally with age or as a result of injury. This type of hearing loss is permanent. Hearing aids are often required to improve hearing in these cases.
- sounds are unable to pass from your outer ear to your inner ear
This is often because of a blockage such as earwax or glue ear when fluid is being trapped behind the eardrum ('conductive hearing loss'). This type of hearing loss is usually temporary. It can often be treated with medication or minor surgery.

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In some cases, surgery that involves using metal or plastic implants can help to restore hearing.

Many different causes can lead to hearing loss. You can find out more about these on the [NHS Choices website](#). They include the following:

- Age – it is the biggest single cause.
- Damage to the ear – this can be from repeated exposure to loud noises over time or after exposure to an exceptionally loud noise.
- Genes – some people may be born deaf or become deaf over time because of a genetic abnormality.
- Infections – such as mumps, measles, rubella or meningitis.
- A perforated ear drum or damage to the hearing bones from injury or a collapsed ear drum.

Some treatments and medicines, such as radiotherapy for nasal and sinus cancer, certain chemotherapy medicines or certain antibiotics can also cause damage to the inner ear, causing hearing loss. There is also a link between hearing loss and some long-term conditions. People with diabetes, chronic kidney disease and cardiovascular disease are at increased risk of hearing loss.

To listen to people tell of their own experience of living with hearing loss, click on any of the links below:

[Paul's Story - 1min 43sec](#)
[Read Reena's Story](#)

[Susan's Story – 1min 34sec](#)
[Read Actress Rula Lenska's story](#)

For blogs, check out the [Limping Chicken](#) or [A Deaf Boy in a Loud World](#). To learn about the life stories of people who are deafblind access the [Sense website](#).

What you can do to prevent hearing loss

- Don't have your television, radio or music on too loud.
- Use headphones that block out more outside noise, rather than turning up the volume.
- Use ear protection equipment at loud concerts and at other events where there are high noise levels, such as motor races.
- Don't insert objects into your ears or your children's ears. This includes fingers, cotton buds, cotton wool and tissue.
- Be aware of the symptoms of common causes of hearing loss, such as ear infections and Ménière's disease.

What you can do to support a person with hearing loss in the workplace

Whether the person is a member of staff or anyone else you come into contact with, you need to consider what reasonable adjustments are required.

As a **line manager**, to support a colleague who lives with hearing loss you should:

- Ensure that there is good lighting in the workplace. People who are deaf give visual clues for effective communication and so need to be able to see what is going on. Those who lip-read will need to be able to see the faces of their colleagues.
- Consider placing them where they can see their colleagues. This will help to reduce any sense of isolation.
- Discuss with them what communication support may be useful for them and ensure this is put in place.

For further information on how best to assist your employees, check out the specific section on the [Action on Hearing Loss website](#).

To support **service users and others** you come into contact with, you should consider the need to

- Use an induction loop system or a portable induction loop
- Provide communication support. This could include Sign language interpreters, Speech-to-text reporters, Lipspeakers or Notetakers.
- Check with the person whether they need information in accessible formats. Don't assume that somebody with hearing loss can easily understand written information. While this may be true for some people, others have a lower proficiency in English. This is because British and Irish Sign Language (BSL and ISL) are structured in a completely different way to English and have their own grammar.
- Provide as many options of getting in touch with you as possible, such as by email, text message, fax, phone, text relay or Next Generation Text.

When you **organise meetings**, check beforehand whether the participants have any particular requirements, including communication support and information in accessible formats.

If you experience hearing loss

If you experience hearing problems you should visit your GP. Action on Hearing Loss offers information and support services for people with hearing loss. You can contact them on telephone 028 9023 9619, textphone 028 9024 9462 or email information.nireland@hearingloss.org.uk. You can also call their free Information Line on 0808 808 0123.

If you live with hearing loss, you should consider telling your employer. It means that the organisation can discuss with you what adjustments could be made to support you in the workplace.

If you care for a person with hearing loss

You can find leaflets and booklets with information specifically for people who care for somebody with hearing loss on the [Action on Hearing Loss website](#) and the [National Deaf Children's Society website](#). Both organisations also offer a range of support services. For further information contact Action on Hearing Loss on 028 9023 9619 or email information.nireland@hearingloss.org.uk. The National Deaf Children's Society can be contacted on 028 9031 3170 or email nioffice@ndcs.org.uk

Sources and further reading

[NHS Choices](#)

[National Deaf Children's Society](#)

[Action on Hearing Loss](#)

[Sense](#)

[ENT UK](#)

[Hearing Link](#)

