

When Your Hearing Disappears Suddenly

By Duncan Collet-Fenson

Each year, between five and 30 per 100,000 individuals unexpectedly lose their hearing in the space of a minute or over a few hours because of sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSNHL). Sadly, immediate medical help is often not sought because the symptoms of SSNHL and other types of hearing loss are very similar and can be mistakenly put down to a temporary blockage caused by wax or fluid. However, SSNHL is a medical emergency, and all types of sudden hearing loss must be checked quickly to rule out anything serious.

WHAT IS SSNHL?

Also known as sudden deafness, SSNHL is defined as a drop of at least 30 dB in more than three frequencies over a short period of time. It most commonly affects just one ear, although it can affect both ears. It seems to be most common between the ages of 30 and 60, and around 50 percent of people recover within two weeks without any specific treatment. To improve the chances of recovery, early treatment with steroids and antiviral medication may be advised where appropriate, taking into account the possible side effects of such treatments. This medication should be offered provided your individual health needs are assessed and there are no other health contraindications for treatment.

If SSNHL occurs, you might notice a pop in the affected ear, after which either the hearing may immediately disappear, or it could slowly decline over a few hours. It may only be apparent when you try to use the phone on the affected ear and/or may be accompanied by vertigo (dizziness), tinnitus (ringing in the ear), or a feeling of fullness in the ear.

WHAT SHALL I DO IF I LOSE MY HEARING SUDDENLY?

SSNHL is a medical emergency, can result in permanent hearing loss, and requires swift attention. If you have sudden loss of hearing, seek immediate medical advice from an audiologist or go straight to an emergency department or an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist. Prompt action and treatment with steroids may improve the chance of reversing the hearing loss. Patients should request an emergency audiogram because it often provides evidence of SSNHL and can rule out ear wax or other possible causes of hearing loss.

HOW IS SSNHL TREATED?

High-dose oral steroids are the most common treatment, although occasionally the patient may need steroid injections directly into the ear. Patients have the best possible outcome if treated within two to three days after the sudden hearing loss



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occurs. Waiting even just two weeks for medical attention may miss the opportunity for steroids to potentially improve your chance of recovery. You may need follow-up tests and repeated hearing assessments to monitor your progress or recovery.

WHY DOES SSNHL HAPPEN?

SSNHL is thought to have various possible causes, including viral infections, blood circulation problems, head trauma, benign tumors on the hearing and balance nerves, or autoimmune diseases. In most cases, the exact cause is never found. SSNHL can happen unexpectedly at any age regardless of any previous hearing issues, and only 10 percent of those diagnosed have an identifiable cause.

CAN YOU PROTECT AGAINST SSNHL?

Prevention is difficult as there are no clear-cut ways to deter the onset of SSNHL, but monitoring your general health and protecting your ears where possible are advisable.

- Protect your hearing at work where necessary and when in loud environments.
- Wear a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike.
- Monitor your blood pressure because high blood pressure can cause a vascular episode in the cochlea.
- Be aware of tinnitus (ringing in the ear)—sudden onset or a change in tone.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SSNHL?

If you have recently experienced a trauma to the head, ear infection, blood circulation issues, Ménière's disease, or neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis, you may be at increased risk of SSNHL. However, SSNHL can occur without any warning, so it's important that you take any sudden hearing loss seriously.

Acknowledgment: Thank you to Ian Bottrill, an ENT lead consultant surgeon for Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust, for his contribution to this article.

Download a printable SSNHL Checklist here: bit.ly/SSNHLChecklist

How to Talk to Your Family About Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

When someone in the family has hearing loss, the whole family is impacted. Getting everyone on the same page can help enhance communication and make hearing loss much less frustrating and difficult for all. As the person with hearing loss, it is your responsibility to allow your family to share your unique journey. Here are some tips to do just that.

1. Tell them about your hearing loss. Your immediate family is usually the first to know, but your extended family may not be aware that you have trouble hearing. Be upfront and open about your struggles to allow others to provide the help you need. This may also help explain any mishearings or non-sequiturs that occur.

2. Explain what your hearing loss is like. Hearing loss is difficult to understand for people who have not experienced it, so you may need to explain your hearing loss several times and in a variety of settings to give them a full picture. Suggest that your family members wear earplugs in a safe setting for them to experience what it's like to have hearing difficulties. This won't be fully accurate since earplugs don't mimic the distortion that comes with hearing loss, but it may give them an idea of your condition.

3. Bring them to your audiologist appointment. Learning about your audiogram and the severity of your hearing loss from an expert may help them understand the seriousness of the challenges you face. Your family can also help your audiologist get a better sense of the communication situations that are the most challenging for you, which will aid in your treatment.

4. Share your emotions about your hearing loss. While it is tempting to keep a stiff upper lip, the more you share the frustrations and sadness that surround your hearing loss, the closer your relationships with your family will be. Vulnerability is the path to true partnership.

5. Break down the stigma. If you are comfortable with your hearing issues, others will be too. When I was growing up, my father had hearing loss but would not discuss it. This made hearing loss an unmentionable topic in the family and prevented us from assisting him when he needed it. Make your hearing loss a normal part of the family dynamic.

6. Teach them communication best practices. Small things like getting a person's attention before speaking, keeping



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your mouth uncovered, and always facing the person with hearing loss when you speak can go a long way toward improving communication. Educate family members about what they need to do to help you hear your best. Be as specific as possible so they can better understand your needs and don't resort to yelling or leaning into your ear to talk.

7. Invite them to your self-advocacy efforts. When your family collects the caption reader at the movies for you or asks the restaurant manager to lower the music volume, you feel their strong support. These gestures also help you conserve energy for the additional self-advocacy battles that likely lie ahead. Involve your family in activities and volunteer events with your hearing loss community. The more they learn about hearing loss, the better they can understand and support you in your challenges.

8. Create a visual signal for when you didn't hear something. Visual signals can be just as effective as asking "What?" and won't interrupt the flow of the conversation. They can also limit the frustration on both sides when you repeatedly ask someone to speak louder.

9. Experiment with new technologies. Ask your family to help you test new assistive listening devices to see if they make conversation easier when you're dining out or in other settings with background noise. This can be a fun adventure, especially with kids who tend to be more tech-savvy.

10. Bring your sense of humor. Mishearings will occur, so don't take them too seriously. Some can be very funny if you let them be. Keeping a light-hearted attitude can go a long way toward building family support.

Involving your family in your hearing loss journey will help you develop a strong support network where you need it most. Being honest, asking for specific assistance, and enlisting them in your self-advocacy efforts will help strengthen your relationships and enhance communication. 



Ms. Eberts is a hearing health advocate, writer, and avid Bikram yogi. She is the founder of Living With Hearing Loss, a blog and online community for people living with hearing loss and tinnitus. She also serves on the Board of Trustees of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). She has adult-onset genetic hearing loss, and hopes that by sharing her story she will help others live more peacefully with their own hearing issues.

8 Tools to Reduce the Impact of Stigma

By Holly Cohen and Nancy M. Williams

Stigma exists in your external environment, but it can also manifest from inside of you in the messages that you tell yourself. Consider making changes in your life to reduce stigma by committing to at least one of the following tools:

Tool #1: Take responsibility for your hearing loss. Accept your hearing loss and resist the urge to deny it. In most cases, your hearing loss is not the secret you think it is. Commit to wearing your hearing aids or cochlear implant(s) every day to hear better. Visit your audiologist for adjustments to ensure that your devices are working well.

Tool #2: Create and adopt new messages about your hearing loss. Get a better understanding of how internal and/or external stigma manifests in your life. Determine which voices in your head belong to you—and which ones belong to other people. Focus on what you can control. If you feel “less” because of your hearing loss, alter the message that you tell yourself by changing “I can’t” statements to “I can.” Accept that the hearing loss is one part of you but it’s not all of who you are.

Tool #3: Make a list of difficult listening situations. Reflect on each day of the week and make a list of challenging listening situations organized by home, work, and public places. Be specific and note what you’re feeling—uncomfortable, vulnerable, embarrassed, or ashamed. If a situation triggers an unhappy memory from the past, add the memory to your list.

Tool #4: Plan how to talk about your hearing loss. If your hearing aid or cochlear implant is visible, your hearing loss is probably not a secret. If your device is not visible, other people such as your family, friends, and co-workers might not know about your challenges with hearing clearly. In either situation, it takes courage to accept your hearing loss and no small amount of bravery to talk about it. Plan what you want to say. Consider practicing out loud with someone you trust.

Tool #5: Ask for accommodations. Technology is ever-changing. Educate yourself about the range of assistive listening devices so that you can identify and request the appropriate




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technology and accommodations that you need. People in your life may not know what is available or appropriate for your condition. Become the expert, then ask. Learn about not only technical solutions but also non-technical strategies like note-taking buddies at work.

Tool #6: Communicate effectively and comfortably. How you handle your hearing loss will have a direct impact on the people you closely and regularly interact with. Teach the people in your life how to best communicate with you so that you can hear clearly. For example, remind them to face you when they speak. Your hearing difficulties can be as new and challenging for them as they are for you. Ask speakers to repeat their point in a different way. Remember that humor goes a long way to increase comfort for everyone.

Tool #7: Set realistic and meaningful goals. Living well with hearing loss requires change and adaptability. Change happens slowly and requires commitment. Don’t take on more than is reasonable and consider your other responsibilities. However, make a commitment to a meaningful and achievable goal to reduce the effects of stigma on your life.

Tool #8: Connect with other people with hearing loss. The challenges of living with hearing loss and ways to overcome them are known best by those who live with it. Consider participating in online forums and connecting with local hearing loss advocacy groups and events to meet people who “get it” (e.g., AG Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Association of Late Deafened Adults, Hands & Voices, Hearing Health Foundation, and Hearing Loss Association of America, among others). Engaging in these communities and events can help you be yourself and learn from others who understand the impact of living with hearing loss. 



Ms. Cohen, left, is a hearing health advocate and speaker who has been impacted by stigma, professionally and personally, while living with hearing loss for decades. **Ms. Williams** is a strategic management consultant, advocate, and speaker in hearing health care, with expertise in

new market development, patient engagement, and consumer insight.

Applying for a Job: Tips for People with Hearing Loss

By Lise Hamlin

Landing a good job, fitting into a new workplace, and successfully advocating for yourself to ensure you are a productive and valued employee, while never easy, are even more complicated when you have hearing loss. Even the first steps of applying for a job and navigating an interview can be a challenge. To meet your career goals, you need the right tools, an understanding of your own hearing loss and the accommodations that work best for you, as well as the skills to successfully advocate for the necessary accommodations at work. Take note of the following tips to help you better manage the job application process.

APPLYING FOR A JOB

- Only apply for jobs for which you are qualified.
 - The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (and the Rehabilitation Act for federal government jobs and government contractor jobs) prohibit discrimination against qualified employees with disabilities. Learn more at www.ada.gov.
 - Qualified employees are those who can perform the essential functions of the job. If you feel that you need more experience, consider doing some volunteer work.
- What are the "essential functions" of the job?
 - These details should be found on the job vacancy announcement and discussed further at the initial interview. If the essential functions are not obvious, don't hesitate to ask the job poster, recruiter, or Human Resource officer.
 - The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) determines on a case-by-case basis whether a function is essential by evaluating if the employee(s) doing the job can actually perform the function.
 - Does the position exist only to perform a particular function? For example, if an individual is hired to be a court reporter, the ability to transcribe spoken words into a



written format would be an essential function, since that is the only reason the position exists.

- What degree of expertise or skill is required to perform the function? If an employee is hired for his or her expertise or ability to perform a particular function, the performance of that task would be an essential function. A person hired with the credentials of an attorney may be asked to draft contracts as an essential function of the job.
- The term "essential functions" does not include the marginal functions of the position. For example, if someone hired as an accountant was also asked to answer the phone, depending on the situation, it could be considered a marginal function.

WHEN DO YOU REVEAL YOUR HEARING LOSS?

How and when to inform a prospective employer about your hearing loss is entirely up to you. There is no need to insert your hearing loss into your resume or letter of inquiry. Many employers have little understanding about hearing loss, so it's best to not allow any misguided assumptions get in the way of landing an interview.

Any potential employer is not permitted to ask about your medical condition or require you to take a medical exam before making a job offer. An employer cannot ask whether you have a hearing loss or if you have had a hearing evaluation. However, an employer can ask if you can perform the duties of the job with or without reasonable accommodation. You are



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Dining Out for People with Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

Dining out can be a loud and stressful experience. Today's popular restaurant décor includes hard woods, mirrors, and metal surfaces that reflect noise rather than absorb it. A lack of carpeting and other sound-absorbing surfaces creates a cacophony of sound reverberating around the space. Background music combined with the clinking of cutlery on plates and conversations between other patrons add to the overwhelming din. Hearing the waiter recite the specials, let alone enjoying a quiet conversation with your dinner companions, becomes almost impossible. This is true for everyone. Imagine the challenge if you have hearing loss.

Many people with hearing loss avoid restaurants because of the noise. But with these tips, you can make your next dinner out a success.

1. Research quiet restaurants. Quiet restaurants may be few and far between, but they do exist. Read restaurant reviews online; many now feature loudness ratings. Ask friends for recommendations, or consult free crowdsourcing apps, like Soundprint or iHEARu, to locate quiet restaurants in your area.

2. Provide hearing-related information early. When you make your reservation, mention that you wear hearing aids and request a quiet table. When the restaurant calls to confirm, reiterate your request. When you arrive at the restaurant, remind the hostess once again. If the first table you are given does not suffice, request to be moved.

3. Request a table in a corner. A corner table or a location beside a wall is often quieter because there is a barrier between you and the rest of the restaurant noise. Sitting with your back to the wall will help limit distracting noise from behind you. Experiment to see what works best for you.

4. Ask for a round table. A round table makes group conversation easier. People are more likely to face forward as they speak, projecting their voice towards the center of the table and keeping their faces visible for speech reading.

5. Consider restaurants with sound-absorbing décor. Look for old school restaurant design features like carpet, drapes, cushioned seats, fabric tablecloths, and acoustic tiles. Many restaurants today prefer hard surfaces like wood and glass. Preview the décor online or stop in to see it for yourself before making a reservation.

6. Advocate for your needs. Ask the manager to turn down the music or move you to a quieter table. Request the specials in writing rather than verbally from the waiter. Hearing




loss is an invisible condition, so others won't know that you need help unless you ask for it. If a restaurant is not open to meeting your needs, vote with your dollars and do not return.

7. Avoid busy times. Restaurants are quieter at off-hours, and the management may be more amenable to requests to turn down the music. Eat early or late, or try dining outside if the weather permits. Outdoor spaces often have fewer hard surfaces to reflect sound and more organic materials to absorb it.

8. Limit group size. It is fun to eat out in large groups, but this makes conversation more difficult in a noisy environment. Limit groups to four to six people if possible. If a larger group is required, focus on conversing with the people next to you and across from you.

9. Manage the seating arrangement. Position yourself towards the center of a large group, and have the people who are more difficult for you to hear sit directly across from you so that you can read their lips. In a group of four, I like to have the person hardest for me to hear sit diagonally across from me. That way if he or she turns to speak to the person next to him or her, his or her voice is still heading in my general direction. Don't be shy about asking for a different seat if needed.

10. Experiment with technology fixes. Ask your audiologist to create a restaurant program for your hearing aids that will block out background sounds and focus on voices, or try an assistive listening device. Speech-to-text apps can also be used discreetly right on your phone. Remote microphones where your dining companions wear microphones that connect directly to your hearing aids also work well. 



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The Hearing Journal is proud to announce a partnership with the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) to provide patient handouts. For information on HLAA activities and events, visit <https://www.hearingloss.org/>.

How to Enjoy the Movies or Live Theater with Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

People with hearing loss are often nervous about going to the movies. They fear they won't be able to understand the dialogue over the booming soundtrack, so they often wait for a film's digital copy that they can watch in the privacy of their own home with the captions on. The same goes for attending live theater. With theater ticket prices on the rise, some people with hearing loss wonder why they should risk spending money on a show they might not understand.

But times are changing. Most movie theaters now provide free captioning devices, and many live entertainment theaters, particularly on Broadway, are improving the hearing access of patrons with hearing difficulties. So, note these tips to enjoy movies and theater shows to the fullest.

- Movie theaters frequently offer free captioning devices.

Find theaters with caption readers at CaptionFish.com. Enter your location to search by theater or movie times, or simply ask at your local theater. Most large chains now offer caption devices for all shows. Go to the information booth or concessions stand to borrow one and return it at the end of the movie.

Most caption devices have an OLED display attached to an adjustable support arm that fits into the cup holder of your seat. The screen is small, but the captions are clear. Privacy-visors prevent the captions from bothering others while the bendable arm lets you position the captions in a spot that works for you. Some movie theaters offer captioned glasses that display the captions in the front of you as you watch the movie.

Be sure the device works before the movie begins. Most previews are now captioned, which is a good way to test if the captions are legible and the flexible arm is rigid enough to keep the screen in place. Arrive early so you have time to exchange a broken device for a new one before the movie starts. Inform the manager when there is a problem with a device so it can be fixed for the next user.

- Live theater is expanding its accessibility options.

At live performances, there are many options for hearing enhancement. An infrared headset is the most common



assistive device. Some theaters often offer FM systems as well. With these, you connect either by plugging in headphones or linking directly to your hearing aid via the telecoil setting. You may need to line up to get these devices so plan on arriving at the venue early.

Newer technologies like hearing loops are growing in popularity because of the excellent sound quality. It also allows people with t-coil-enabled hearing aid or cochlear implant to tap into the loop directly. No other device is required.

If you don't have a t-coil enabled aid, explore hearing loop receiver earphones that can be used to tap into a hearing loop. You will probably need to remove your hearing aids to use these earphones.

Captioning options are also becoming more common in live theater. Open captioned shows are spectacular, but limited to specific performances during a production's run. Open captioning provides real-time captioning in sync with the live action. Captions appear on a display board usually located at one side of the stage. To see captioned performance schedules, visit the website of the non-profit group, TDF (www.tdf.org).

Another innovation in captioning is GalaPro, a smartphone app that provides captioning for any performance of a Broadway show after the first four weeks of the run. The captions are displayed on your phone rather than on a screen next to the stage, so be sure to charge your phone's battery in advance. The captions are not real-time as with an open captioned performance, but are preset to display using lighting cues. Reported synchronicity is 95 percent. New delivery methods including glasses and better options for holding the phone for easier viewing are currently being explored.

With so many choices available, people with hearing loss no longer need to avoid the movies or live theater performances. **T**



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Yoga for People with Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

Yoga combines physical poses with the philosophy of patience and self-acceptance. Its health benefits include developing stronger muscles, better balance, and increased flexibility. A robust yoga practice can also help people cope with the day-to-day frustrations of living with hearing loss. When combined with meditation, it can also help minimize tinnitus symptoms. People with hearing loss may be skeptical about trying yoga. They wonder if they will be able to hear the instructor well enough to follow along in a class or if their devices will fall off when performing different yoga poses. These are all real concerns, but the following tips should help you enjoy your yoga practice even when you have hearing loss.

BEFORE YOU START

- 1. Find the right studio.** Visit a few yoga studios in your area to get a sense of the classes being offered. Speak to each manager about your hearing loss. There may be other students in the same boat. Ask the manager about classes with students of different age ranges and abilities, which might make for a less intimidating setting. Try a studio that seems the most accommodating.
- 2. Learn about the poses in advance.** Most studios offer new student workshops. This is a great way to learn the basic poses in a smaller setting where hearing will be easier and one-on-one attention is the norm. Familiarity with the poses will give you confidence before heading into a group class. You can also watch videos for yoga beginners at home.

DURING CLASS

- 1. Go with a friend.** If you have a friend who does yoga, ask if you can go with him or her to a class. Your friend might also be able to give you a tutorial ahead of time to let you know what to expect. During a class, you can follow along by watching your friend without feeling awkward about observing someone too closely.
- 2. Before a class starts, inform your yoga teacher about your hearing loss.** This knowledge will allow the teacher to give you extra assistance if you seem to be missing something. Don't feel awkward about talking to the teacher about your hearing loss. It is typical for students to discuss physical limitations such as an injury or illness with the yoga teacher before class.



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- 3. Find a central spot in the room.** This way, you can watch the people in front of you if you don't hear the teacher's instructions, and you can see other yogis behind or beside you. It is best if you can also see the teacher in case he or she demonstrates any of the poses. You can also ask the teacher to recommend a spot that would work best considering your hearing issue.
- 4. Use a headband or sweatband to protect your devices.** If you find your cochlear implant or hearing aids fall off or move around too much during class, try holding them in place with a bandana or sweatband. This will also keep the sweat out of your ears and protect your devices from excess moisture.
- 5. Have fun.** Hey, it's only yoga! Who cares if your downward dog could use some work or if you are slightly behind the flow of the class as it moves to the next pose? Look around the room—others probably are too. Yoga is about improving your health and mental well-being, not a competitive sport. It also gets easier the more you do it.
- 6. Don't give up if the first class is a dud.** The first class you try might not be the right one for you. Try another class, instructor, or yoga style, or explore another studio. It's like trying out hearing aids or princes—the first one you kiss might not be a good match. 🙏

Managing Hearing Loss in Winter

By Mark Patterson

The winter months can be long and cold. But don't let your hearing health suffer. Moisture buildup and middle ear infections are usually more prevalent in cold weather, and the hardware and performance of hearing aids can often be impaired when exposed to water and wind. So, what can you do?

1. Come up with a plan. These preventative measures can save you from problems down the road:

- Clean or suction debris from any exposed areas on your aid, and double check the receiver, battery contacts, and microphone ports.
- Properly remove any earwax from your ear canal.
- Purchase an auditory training program from your audiologist to keep up with your hearing-cognition regimen.

2. Keep your hearing aids dry. Consider getting a dehumidifier, which is a specialized drying canister for hearing aids. Store your hearing device in this canister overnight with the batteries taken out and the battery doors left open. If you don't have a dehumidifier, remember to regularly remove your hearing aid batteries and clean everything with a dry cloth.

If your hearing aids get wet, note these emergency tips:

- Immediately wipe them dry, remove the ear mold if your aid has one, and take out the batteries.
- Dry the battery compartment using a Q-tip or a safe cleaning tool.
- Place your hearing aids in a dehumidifier or Ziploc bag with silica gel packets.
- Let your devices sit for 24 hours.

3. Keep your ears dry. Water is the number one culprit for ear infections, which, if left untreated, can cause inflammation and temporary hearing loss. Cases of extreme cold can also aggravate certain preexisting conditions like exostosis (www.hear-it.org, 2011).

If water gets trapped in your ear:

- Do not use Q-tips.
- Use swimmer's ear drops to help clear any trapped water.
- See your physician if you experience any ongoing pain, pressure, or popping.

4. Socialize. Try not to isolate yourself for more than one or two consecutive days. Even if you don't feel like leaving the warm comfort of your home, consider going to dinner or movies




with friends or visiting your local library. If you're snowed in, do not sit in the quiet for too long. Listen to the radio or TV, or try an auditory training program. The more you practice hearing speech in noise and the more conversations you have in different environments, the easier it is to maintain your cognitive and hearing health benchmarks.

5. Prepare for travel. If you're planning for a winter getaway, prepare a hearing aid travel checklist. Include items like extra batteries (more than you think you'll need), cleaning tools, and backup devices (if you have them). Check out this handout (<http://bit.ly/2l8Unuh>) for tips on traveling with hearing loss. For accessibility information when traveling within the United States, visit www.transportation.gov.

6. Wear outdoor gear to protect your ears and prevent water damage of your device. When exercising outdoors or playing winter sports, wear wrist and forehead sweatbands to help intercept moisture. Use gears that fit over your hearing device and earmuffs to help safeguard your ears and hearing devices against snow and freezing temperatures.

When you're in a noisy area, particularly with loud snow blowers or snowmobiles, wear over-the-ear protection instead of in-the-ear varieties that have a tendency to trap liquid in the ear.

7. Give extra attention to children with hearing loss. In winter months, children are more prone to ear infections, which can exacerbate any existing hearing impairment (pennstatehershey.adam.com, 2016). Be mindful of any middle ear infection symptoms such as irritability, pain, loss of balance, trouble paying attention, or increased hearing difficulty. To help prevent infections and buildup of moisture-related bacteria, clean your child's ear mold with an audiologist-approved cleaning agent.

8. Manage your stress. It's easy for holiday anxiety to be replaced by winter stress, and if you're already struggling with your hearing, that stress can multiply. Though it is important to socialize, also take some time for yourself. Winter won't last forever, so enjoy the world around you. 



Mr. Patterson is a writer and videographer based in Chicago, IL. He frequently writes for REM Audiology and other speech and hearing practices in South Jersey and Philadelphia. He is a graduate of Temple University.

Tips for Traveling With Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

Traveling when you have hearing loss can be challenging, but that's no reason to miss out on discovering new locales. Follow these tips to have a safe and rewarding adventure.

Prepare in Advance

Before booking a hotel, ask about available accommodations for people with hearing loss. Many hotels, especially in developed countries, have rooms with specific amenities for people with hearing loss (e.g., flashing lights for the phone and doorbell) if you request them in advance. If you are traveling with a tour company, alert them to your accommodation needs. They may be able to help.

Many museums in large cities provide hearing loops or other assistive technology if you request it. The same goes for theaters and other performance spaces. Send an email to the venues for up-to-date information.

Learn about your destination before you go. Familiarize yourself with the names of places, important historical figures and the like. That way when you hear these names, they will sound more familiar and be easier for you to understand.

Use Technology for Logistics

Whether you are traveling by plane, train, or automobile, download all relevant apps onto your smartphone before you go. Most airlines and train company apps include timetables and provide alerts for gate changes or delays. Practice using the apps before you go so you are prepared if you have trouble on your trip.

Advocate for Yourself

Inform your tour guides and fellow travelers about your hearing loss and provide specific suggestions on how they can help you hear your best. Tell your guides that you will stay close to them so you can better hear and see their face for lipreading. Kindly request them ahead of time to speak clearly and only while facing the group whenever possible.

Have an assistive listening device (e.g., pocket talkers or FM systems) handy in case you'll need to transmit the guide's voice directly to your hearing aids, blocking out background noise.

When dining out, request for quiet corner tables at restaurants or sit outside when the weather is nice. Ask your hotel concierge to suggest quieter restaurants so you can reserve a table.



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Remind People What You Need

People often forget about hearing loss because it is invisible, so don't be shy about reminding others of your needs. A gentle prompt like holding your hand behind your ear often works well and does not disrupt the flow of dialogue. Save non-critical clarification questions for a quiet moment or break, but be sure to ask them. When logistical information is provided, request it in written form. Carry a notebook and pen in your bag to make that an easy process.

Bring Ear Protection

Traveling can be loud! In cities, traffic and construction noise are everywhere. Attending a musical performance is a great way to experience a new place, but the volume can be unsafe. Don't be afraid to turn down or remove your hearing aids and wear ear protection when needed. Bring extra earplugs to share with your traveling companions.

Pack Extra Batteries and Chargers

Your devices won't work without power. Be sure to bring a sufficient supply of batteries and extras. Replacement batteries may be harder to find in unfamiliar locations. Pack a supply of batteries in different travel bags in case one gets misplaced. Check that all your chargers are working well and bring an extra if available.

Have a Back-Up Plan

Having your hearing aids on the fritz can be troubling at any time, but when you are far away from home and your audiologist—in another country, for example—it can feel like a disaster. Set a back-up plan before you go and test it out so you can easily implement it if needed. Examples include using a pocket-talker, an FM system, or connecting a high-quality headset to an app like EarMachine on your smartphone. If you have spare hearing aids, bring those too. [M](#)