

Living Well with Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can happen to anyone. It can be caused by a number of factors, including injury, infection, illness, loud noises – and simply growing older. While the degree of hearing loss can differ significantly from person to person, it often leaves people feeling discouraged, isolated, and frustrated.

Of course, the first step to living well with hearing loss is accepting the fact that you or a loved one is actually experiencing a loss. Many people are unaware that their hearing has changed, especially if it has happened gradually with age. Others deny they are experiencing a hearing loss or deny it presents a significant change for them. The way you choose to look at hearing loss is as individual as you are, but you may find these ideas useful in successfully living with your hearing loss.

Moving from Loss to Living Well

Hearing loss can initially throw your emotions – and your life – into turmoil, particularly if your hearing loss is rapid. That's because experiencing a hearing loss can impact so much of your life, from handling phone calls at work, to socializing with family and friends. The simple pleasures of watching movies or listening to music may not be as satisfying. Facing these changes can often trigger strong feelings. For a while, you may find that personal relationships take greater effort and your interest in social interaction declines.

It's important to understand and accept your emotions as a normal part of the process of living with hearing loss. Feelings of fear, frustration, anger, sadness, depression, and dwelling on the hearing loss are not unusual. And, as much as you might want to "get over it," the process can't be ignored or hurried. For some it may take a few days or weeks; for others it can take longer. But the reality is that millions of people are not only living with hearing loss, but living well, and you can too!

You're Not Alone

Hearing loss doesn't only affect you – it affects everyone who loves you and everyone who comes in contact with you. As you work to understand your hearing loss and how best to address the changes in your life, you can take advantage of the tremendous amount of support available to you. You'll find that these resources can provide you answers, but most of all, you'll get the sense that you're not alone.

On the Web, you can find a professional audiologist or a hearing aid specialist, research products to support hearing, and get advice about living well with hearing loss. You can find ways to connect with others who are experiencing a similar change in life. You can also reach out using the phonebook, or by asking for advice from members of your community organizations.

No matter what you're experiencing, there's probably a website, blog, chat room, social network, or group forum that's right for you. But in the end, friends and family may turn out to be your most valuable resources for advice and support.

Make Technology Your Friend

Advances in digital technology have made it easier than ever for people who want to live well with hearing loss. While digital devices cannot bring your hearing back to where it was, they can amplify and clarify sounds in a specific frequency range to meet your needs. Most importantly, they can make communication more satisfying.

To learn which hearing solutions might be best for you, start by having a hearing test, called an audiogram. A qualified audiologist can determine your hearing loss and then describe options that work best for you. Equipment choices are a highly personal matter. You may choose a hearing aid to hear better generally, or an assistive hearing technology for specific purposes, such as a phone call amplifier, a personal television amplifier, or an alerting device that turns everyday sounds - such as doorbells and phone ringers - into flashing lights or vibrations.

Adapt Your Communication Style

Last, but far from least, are the simple adaptive strategies you can use to help make daily communication more rewarding. For instance, we all know that a good phone conversation can leave us feeling more connected to the people in our lives. If your hearing is getting in the way of staying in touch, getting the right phone equipment could be the answer to making phone calls more rewarding.

When speaking face-to-face with someone, learn to pay close attention to facial expressions and body language. These cues will provide a lot of information about what is being said, even if you've never studied lip reading. You'll also want to be sure to ask the person you're speaking with to repeat anything you didn't catch. Your honesty about what you don't hear is the best way to help others learn how to communicate with you more clearly.

Living well with hearing loss requires a balance of the right technologies and strategies. But more than anything, it takes patience to gradually learn what works best for you.