



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT OFFICE ON AGING

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COMMUNICATION DESPITE HEARING LOSS

Do you complain that your loved ones are mumbling or babbling too fast when they talk to you? It could be that you are experiencing hearing loss. Hearing loss affects one in ten Americans. In fact, one in three Americans over the age of 65 has some degree of difficulty hearing, although many deny that there is a problem.

A hearing evaluation is recommended if a person experiences any of the following: hearing but not understanding what is being said; not hearing the radio or television except when the volume is too high for others; having difficulty understanding people on the telephone; difficulty conversing in gatherings with lots of background noise; asking people to repeat themselves often; needing to watch people's mouths when they talk; or missing high tones and rings.

A thorough hearing evaluation can rule out simple problems such as wax blockage and can determine if referral to a physician is necessary. Only five to ten percent of hearing loss can be corrected medically or surgically.

In most cases, hearing aids will be recommended to improve communication ability. But hearing aids are not the answer for everyone. First of all, they do not discriminate between what you want to hear and the rest of the noise around you – they just amplify everything. Secondly, like any piece of technology, they require time and practice to learn to use, and, in time, require service and battery replacement. They tend to cost more than \$1000 and are not covered by Medi-Care or HMOs. However, Medi-Cal will pay for hearing aids prescribed for low-income people with hearing loss great enough to be medically necessary.

Whether the hearing-impaired person uses a hearing aid or not, it is a good idea for family and friends to do the following: Get the person's attention first – make sure he is looking at you before you begin to talk. Face the person - have the light on the speaker's face not in the listener's eyes. Don't hide your mouth when talking. Talk in a quiet place, if possible. Speak slowly and clearly, but don't shout. Use facial expressions and hand-movements to get the message across. Write out important, specific messages. Lastly, when discussing things of importance, be sure the person is not bluffing or pretending he heard you - have him repeat what you have said for accuracy. Following these tips should make communicating easier and more pleasurable for both parties.

A wide variety of products called Assistive Listening Devices are available to improve a person's ability to hear. These include special telephones, amplifiers, and alerting devices. For assistance in obtaining these devices, or for information for older adults and their caregivers, call the Office on Aging, Information and Assistance Line: **1-800-510-2020**.