TIPS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE PRESBYCUSIS

- When speaking to older adults who have hearing loss, do so in a quiet place with good lighting, be sure they can see your face, and speak slowly and clearly. If you determine that they didn’t understand what you have said, rephrase your statement with different wording, rather than simply repeating it.

- Many older adults with hearing impairment wait years before seeking evaluation or obtaining a hearing aid. If you detect hearing loss in one of your patients, refer to an audiologist.

- Provide written information to supplement what you have told the patient. This will allow the patient to fill in any information missed during conversation, and help them remember and share that information with family/friends.
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TIP 5: Confirm Understanding with Clarifying Questions. Encourage PHLs to repeat what they heard and understood. Specific responses and explanations of what was just said help to confirm understanding versus simply asking “Do you understand?”

TIP 6: Rephrase Rather Than Repeat. Often a PHL’s first response when they do not understand is to say “What?” or “Huh?” It may be tempting to simply repeat exactly what you said, but this is often unhelpful. Instead, rephrase what you just said and provide the information in another way. See example in the box at right.

TIP 7: Pause at Meaningful Places in the Conversation. PHLs are trying to process spoken information as fast as they can, and they can fall behind. Pausing in between phrases can help PHLs catch up and give them time to ask for clarification.

TIP 8: Provide Context and Avoid Changing Subjects Without Warning Providing PHLs with context gives them one more tool to compensate for their hearing loss. Context makes it easier to fill in auditory gaps. If you must switch topics, provide a statement to prepare the PHL for the change. For example, “About your medication (pause), how long have you been taking metformin?”

TIP 9: Use Assistive Technology. Often hearing loss can be so significant that providing additional volume in addition to the tips already discussed, can provide a significant benefit to PHLs. Assistive technology like Pocket Talkers or FM systems (see figure) are portable, easy to use, and relatively inexpensive. These devices improve access to speech by amplifying a speaker’s voice directly into the PHL’s ears. This can help reduce the effect of background noise and reverberation. The picture at right shows a pocket-talker.

TIP 10: Refer to an Audiologist. On average, people struggle with hearing loss for 5-7 years before seeking assistance, and they often wait over 10 years after diagnosis before being fitted with hearing aids. Those from minority groups and those with less education have lower rates of hearing aid use. These delays can impair quality of life, with PHLs often experiencing depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Appropriate management of hearing loss can allow PHLs to participate more fully in life. Note, however, that while hearing aids can help amplify missing speech sounds and improve communication, PHLs may still struggle to understand speech in noisy environments and will benefit from the communication strategies outlined in this edition of Elder Care.

Other Recommendations for Improving Communication with Individuals Who Have Hearing Impairment

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<th>What to Do</th>
<th>How to Do It</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provide Accurate Visual Information</td>
<td>Excessive facial hair can make it difficult for patients to see important visual cues. Avoid chewing gum or eating while speaking, as this can provide inaccurate cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face the Person</td>
<td>Be at the same level, facing the person, to provide more visual cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use Paper and Pencil</td>
<td>If you are unsuccessful with spoken communication, write the information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide Printed Materials</td>
<td>Whenever possible, provide printed materials supporting the information you just provided the PHL. This will not only fill in any information missed during conversation, but will also help them remember and share that information with family/friends.</td>
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References and Resources


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