

# A Tough Conversation

**A loved one's hearing loss is your journey too.**

Hearing loss isn't a journey only one person takes. The people close to the one with hearing loss get to tag along as well.

Detailed studies have taken place all over the world looking at the effect on the people closest to someone with hearing loss. These 'communication partners' include spouses, caregivers, children and best friends.

There's no question quality of life for the person with hearing loss is impacted by increasingly poor hearing. But the communication partners' quality of life changes too.

**People with untreated hearing loss experience:**

- **1 in 2 relationships break down**
- **1 in 3 lose touch with friends and family**

# How does hearing loss affect relationships?

What's affected?	How it's affected
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased time &amp; effort to communicate</li><li>• Less spontaneous conversation</li><li>• Frustration at having to repeat oneself</li><li>• Need for different communication techniques like:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Face-to-face</li><li>• Loud voices</li><li>• Written notes</li><li>• Correcting or answering for spouse/partner</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>The relationship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Frustration &amp; embarrassment at partner's behaviour</li><li>• Increased tension</li><li>• Lessening of intimate relationship</li><li>• Loss of companionship</li><li>• Having to consider the hearing loss in all situations</li><li>• Protecting partner in social situations</li><li>• Spouses/partners feel they've done all the adapting</li><li>• The person with hearing loss expecting others to accommodate their hearing loss</li><li>• Constant worry about hearing loss partner's safety (they may not hear an alarm, doorbell, traffic)</li></ul>
<b>Social situations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partner staying home from group activities because the hearing loss person doesn't want to go</li><li>• Declining family invitations out of embarrassment</li><li>• Partner can't enjoy social situations because of translating and repeating for hearing loss partner</li></ul>

## Talking to a loved one about their hearing loss

Talking with your spouse, partner or friend about hearing loss can be a sensitive subject. **They could get defensive or downright angry if they feel criticized.**

It's possible they believe hearing loss is only an old person's condition and it can be hard to admit one is getting on in years. (By the way, hearing loss has many causes unrelated to aging like loud noise exposure, illness, medications or genetics.)

## They think they're managing just fine – your contribution to why they won't get tested

About **30%** of the people we see who leave without treating their hearing loss tell us, **"I don't need hearing aids; I'm managing just fine!"**

Would you be surprised to know some of the reason they feel they're 'managing just fine' is because their partner or spouse is protecting them, translating for them, making excuses for them, and avoiding talking about hearing loss?

## Give them an unvarnished experience of life with their hearing loss

- **Note how often you have to repeat something before it is understood.** Keep a daily 'hearing health' diary noting what was happening and how often things had to be repeated.
- **Stop raising your voice to be heard.** When you shout, your heart rate and blood pressure increase as your brain connects shouting to the fight or flight response. Your cardiac health will thank you for not raising your voice to be heard.
- **Don't be the messenger of other people's communication.** On top of the challenge of being in the middle, there's risk the message isn't relayed as accurately as when it's received firsthand.

If you're being your spouse's or partner's ears, you aren't helping them. You're making it easier for them to think there's no reason to seek treatment.



## Some ideas for that chat



### 1. **Have the conversation when things are calm and relaxed.**

Talking about hearing loss when someone is already upset or in the middle of a conflict can make them dig in their heels and refuse to consider a hearing test. If you can stay calm and quiet during a planned conversation about possible hearing loss, there may be more willingness to listen.



### 2. **Be ready to stay positive.** If you can stay in a positive tone of voice and body language, there's more chance the spouse or partner will keep listening.



### 3. **Have specific examples.** Make notes when you see something that suggests hearing loss. Describe a specific time and place where someone else they care about was misunderstood or left unanswered and how it made that person feel. Sharing how you're feeling when it happens to you can demonstrate it's not just the one time.



### 4. **Be understanding about their hesitance.** Some people just don't like tests. Others have had bad experiences when they've had medical tests. The hesitance could be coming from many places and understanding their hesitance is another way to be supportive. Ask if they can explain why they're hesitant.



### 5. **Start the conversation from a place of caring.**

Try including thoughts about the wider world in your conversation, rather than making it solely about the person with hearing loss.

# Caring beginnings

## **“Can I share some things I’ve learned in reading about health? I’m a bit concerned.”**

The risks of untreated hearing loss on many aspects of health and wellness are well documented. Ask a Hear Well Be Well representative for a Risks brochure. By talking about both yourself and your spouse or partner from a health perspective, it may feel a bit less one-sided.

## **“I’m worried about our relationship. Can we talk?”**

This is very much about you both and the stress and strain on the relationship. Share how it makes you feel when you talk to them and they don’t respond. Talk about how misunderstandings are happening more often and maybe a hearing test would be good. Wrap it up in how you care about the relationship and how important it is to you.

## **“Let’s go together and get our hearing checked.”**

This can take the conversation away from feeling accusatory or focused only on the person with hearing loss. By offering to share the experience of the hearing test and results, you’re changing it from a blame-game to one you’ll share with each other.

## **“Friends and family are missing how you used to be. How do we help them understand?”**

By moving this from being ‘what’s wrong with you’ into how you can help others understand, you open the door for your spouse or partner to share how they’re experiencing their world and their expectations of how others should interact within it.



# Hearing loss and the behaviours that go with it are way more noticeable than hearing aids.

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