

# Products

to help with  
hearing loss and tinnitus

 **ACTION ON  
HEARING  
LOSS**

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“Being profoundly deaf, I would feel particularly vulnerable when I was home alone. I would have to rely on family who live nearby to help me over the telephone, or if I was expecting a visitor, I’d have to sit by the window and watch out for them walking up the drive. I’d feel particularly unsafe at night as I couldn’t hear the smoke or burglar alarm.

Now I have some excellent products that make life with hearing loss a lot easier. I have a pager receiver that I carry with me at all times, which alerts me with flashing lights or vibrations to the smoke alarm, doorbell and telephone. I also have an alarm clock that vibrates in the morning – I defy anyone not to wake up to it! Now I am much more independent and comfortable in my own home knowing I am safe from harm. I feel as normal as anybody else going about my daily tasks.”

Kelly Blachford, Southampton



You’ll find this leaflet useful if you have hearing loss and want to find out about the products and assistive technology that can help you to communicate, enjoy TV and music, and stay safe in your home. We also tell you what products can help with tinnitus.

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**Please let our Information Line know if you’d like this leaflet in large print, braille or audio (see back page for contact details).**

## What products can help me?

There's a wide range of products and technology that can help you to manage your hearing loss. This leaflet gives you an overview of what's available to help you overcome different challenges. Before buying a product, first check it's suitable for your level of hearing loss. This is determined by the quietest sounds that you can hear, measured in decibels Hearing Level (dBHL). Ask your audiologist (hearing specialist) if you're not sure what your hearing loss level is.

Level of hearing loss	Quietest sounds you can hear, measured in dBHL	What this means for communication
<b>Mild</b>	20-40 (quiet background noise)	You may miss quieter speech, and speech when there's noise.
<b>Moderate</b>	41-70 (average speech levels)	You're likely to mishear words and struggle when there's background noise and in group conversations.
<b>Severe</b>	71-95 (car engine, train, doorbell, alarm clock and other alerting devices)	Hearing speech in most situations is difficult, even with hearing aids. You're more likely to lipread and need assistive devices to help you communicate.
<b>Profound</b>	95+ (heavy machinery, music concerts)	It's likely that hearing aids won't help you to hear speech (they'll only help you to identify which direction sounds come from). You'll need to use assistive devices and communication tactics such as lipreading, and you may prefer to use sign language to communicate. You may benefit from a cochlear implant.

**Top tip:** When buying a product, always make sure it has a 28-day money-back guarantee, so you can make sure it works for you and your hearing loss – and return it if it doesn't.

## What can help me hear speech?

If you struggle to follow conversations in noisy places or find it hard to hear someone speak when they're at a distance, a **conversation listener** can help. This is a small, portable device that picks up speech and amplifies it (makes it louder). You can control the volume, and some listeners also have tone and balance control to improve the clarity of the sound you hear.

### Basic conversation listeners

These are ideal for one-to-one conversations, when the person speaking is no more than 2m away. They are around the size of a TV remote control and are very easy to carry around.

If you don't use hearing aids or a cochlear implant (CI), you can use the listener with headphones, earphones or a stethoset headset. You also have the option of buying a conversation listener with a loop-listening feature, which allows you to use a hearing loop system ([see page 11](#)).

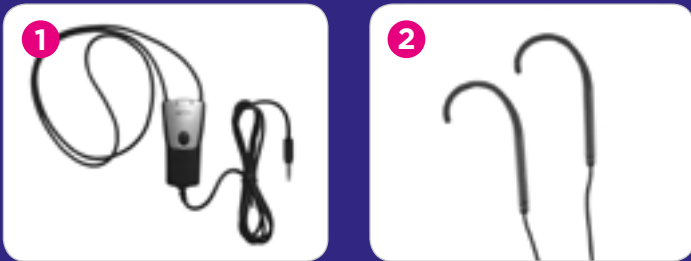
If you use hearing aids or a CI, you can use the conversation listener with either **ear hooks**, which fit over your ears, or a **neckloop**, which you wear around your neck, like a necklace ([see box on page 6](#)).

If you want to hear group conversations, try a table microphone instead. When you place the microphone at the centre of a table, it can pick up the speech from all directions.

## Neckloops and ear hooks

Neckloops (see picture 1) and ear hooks (see picture 2) are designed for people who use hearing aids or CIs that have a hearing loop setting (speak to your audiologist if you don't have this). When you connect the neckloop or ear hooks to an audio device – such as a conversation listener or smartphone – the sound is sent straight to your hearing aids or CI processor (when on the loop setting). This can help you to hear the sound more clearly over background noise.

Neckloops and ear hooks do the same job, so you can choose which you prefer. Some are wired and plug into devices, and others are wireless and use Bluetooth technology to connect to Bluetooth-compatible devices.



## Advanced conversation listeners

These are more expensive than basic listeners, but the main advantage is that they are better at picking up sound clearly over greater distances. Most consist of:

- a **transmitter** containing a small microphone – you give this to, or place it near, the person or people speaking
- a **receiver**, which receives sound from the transmitter and amplifies it; some receivers also contain a microphone, which lets you pick up sounds near you (when you want to).

If you use hearing aids or a CI, you may need to wear a neckloop to transfer the sound from the receiver to your hearing aids or CI processor. However, sometimes the receiver itself is a neckloop.

A **remote microphone** is a type of advanced listener that connects directly to your hearing aids or CI processor. You don't need a receiver, or ear hooks or a neckloop.

You can use a remote microphone to help you hear during one-to-one conversations by clipping it onto the clothing of the person you're talking to or putting it around their neck. You can also use the device during group conversations by placing it in the middle of the table; it will pick up speech from all directions.

As advanced conversation listeners work at distances of up to 20m, they are very useful for lectures, dinner parties, meetings and presentations. You can also use them at home for listening to the TV. Some venues provide advanced listeners – for example, for use on guided tours.

## What can help me hear the TV?

### TV listeners

TV listeners let you listen to the TV at a volume you are comfortable with, without disturbing those around you. They also have many features to make the sound much clearer.

All TV listeners consist of:

- a **base unit**, which connects to your TV
- a **receiver** – this is a neckloop if you use hearing aids or a CI and a stethoset if you don't.

Some TV listeners may stop the sound from coming out of your TV's speakers. Please check with the retailer for more information.

## TV streamers

If you use hearing aids or a CI, you can use a TV streamer to send sound from your TV straight to your hearing aids or CI processor. When you attach the TV streamer to your TV, it will send the sound directly to your hearing aids or CI processor. You can adjust the volume and tonal qualities of the sound so it's easier to follow what's being said.

Alternatively, if you have a remote microphone ([see page 7](#)), you can use this to stream the sound from the TV directly into your hearing aids or CI processor.

## Headphones

Headphones may be useful if you want to listen to the TV or music without hearing aids. The volume range of headphones is limited, however, so they are only suitable if you have mild to moderate hearing loss. You can buy wired or wireless headphones.

There are two types of wireless headphones: infrared and radio. Both types receive signals from a transmitter connected to your TV set or music player.

Walls block infrared signals, so infrared headphones can only receive signals in the same room as the transmitter. Radio signals are not blocked by walls, so radio wireless headphones can receive the signal anywhere in your home.



Find out more in our factsheet *Enjoying TV*.

# What can help me use my home phone?

## Help to hear the phone ring

If you can't hear the phone ring, first check to see if you can turn up the volume of the ringer or change its pitch. Changing the ringtone (if this is an option) may also help. Try placing your phone on a hard surface, as this may make the ring louder.

If this doesn't help, you could try a **telephone alerter**, which uses a loud ringer and flashing light to let you know your phone is ringing. Some also come with a vibrating pad. You could also try an **extension bell**, which lets you hear your phone ring when you're not near it.

## Help to hear the caller's voice

If you have a regular home phone, you could consider using a **telephone amplifier** to make the caller's voice louder. This either fits over the earpiece of the handset, or is connected between the base and handset of the phone.

Alternatively, you could replace your phone with one that's designed specifically for people with hearing loss:

- A **hearing aid compatible phone** sends sound directly into your hearing aids or CI processor during a call. Your hearing aid or CI processor needs to be on the hearing loop setting.
- An **amplified phone** lets you increase the volume of the caller's voice. Most amplified phones are hearing aid compatible and have an extra-loud ringer.

Some hearing aid manufacturers also make phones that directly connect to their brand of hearing aids without you needing to change the hearing aid setting.

Some remote microphones (see page 7) come with an adapter that you can connect to your phone line; this sends the sound from your phone directly into your hearing aids or CI processor. You speak into the microphone.

It's best to speak to your audiologist about what options are available for your hearing aids. If you can, try a phone before you buy it.

 Find out more in our factsheet *Home telephones*.

## What can help me use a smartphone?

Most smartphones have accessibility features for people with hearing loss that allow you to adjust the settings to help with your particular hearing loss. These can be found in the 'Settings' folder of your phone under 'Accessibility'. You will also find options for making text easier to read, having text read as speech and making the touchscreen easier to use.

Most smartphones also have a 'hearing aid' or 'Telecoil' (hearing loop) setting that enables you to use the phone with hearing aids or a CI processor on the hearing loop setting. Some newer hearing aids will also connect to your phone through Bluetooth technology - you'll hear the sound in both hearing aids (if you use two). For hearing aids that don't have this technology, you can get a Bluetooth streamer that will connect your phone to your hearing aids.

You can also get Bluetooth neckloops and ear hooks that connect wirelessly to Bluetooth-compatible phones and other devices.

 See our factsheet *Mobiles and smartphones*.

### emergencySMS service

If you can't make voice calls, you can contact the 999 emergency services by SMS text from your mobile or smartphone using the **emergencySMS service**. You'll have to register your phone with the service before an emergency happens.

Visit [emergencysms.org.uk](https://www.emergencysms.org.uk) to find out more.

## How can Bluetooth technology help?

Bluetooth technology connects Bluetooth-compatible electronic devices, wirelessly, when they are within a range of 20m. Some hearing aids are now Bluetooth compatible and can connect directly to other Bluetooth devices such as smartphones and tablets.

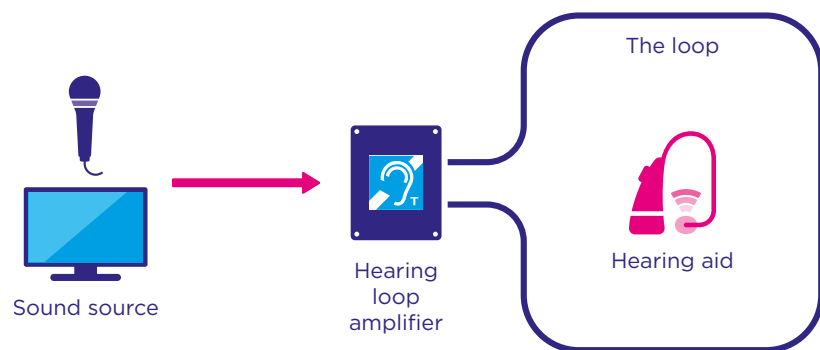
Hearing aids that aren't Bluetooth compatible can connect to Bluetooth devices through an intermediary device called a Bluetooth hearing aid streamer. Ask your audiologist about your options.

## What is a hearing loop system?

A hearing loop system (often just called a loop) can help you hear sound more clearly over background noise if you use hearing aids or a CI switched to the hearing loop setting, or if you have a loop listener. Ask your audiologist about the loop setting if you don't already have it. You'll find loops in public places such as theatres and cinemas. Banks and post offices often have small loop systems at their counters. You can also get loops for use at home.

## How hearing loops work

Loop systems have an amplifier that plugs into a sound source such as a TV or a microphone, and a wire cable (loop) that runs around the edge of the room (or other listening area) and plugs into the amplifier. The electric current in the loop produces a magnetic field that sends sound from the source directly to your hearing aids or CI processor (or loop-listening device).



## What is an infrared system?

Some venues, such as theatres, cinemas and lecture halls, have an infrared system instead of a hearing loop. These work in a similar way to TV listeners (see page 7). You can collect either a neckloop or stethoset receiver from the venue's reception desk.



See our [Products and technology factsheets](#).

## What can alert me to sounds at home?

You can buy alerting devices that are extra-loud, use flashing strobe lights and/or vibrate to alert you to alarms and other sounds. You can buy devices to alert you to a particular sound, such as your doorbell, or a multi-alerting system that can alert you to different sounds, such as your doorbell, baby monitor and smoke alarm.

Several apps (software applications) for smartphones and tablets also give you the option of receiving alerts through your phone. For instance, alerts for when your landline phone or doorbell rings.

**Please note: a flashing light is unlikely to wake you.**

### Alarm clocks

An extra-loud alarm clock may wake you if you have mild to moderate hearing loss. An alarm clock with a vibrating pad that goes under your pillow or mattress will be more likely to wake you if you have moderate to profound hearing loss.

It may also be worth considering a vibrating alarm if you share a room with a person with normal hearing, as an extra-loud alarm may be too loud for them.

There are also vibrating wristwatches and travel alarm clocks.

### Baby monitors

Baby monitors for people with hearing loss use a vibrating pad or flashing light (or both) to let you know your baby is crying. You can also get baby monitors that let you see your baby on your TV screen.

## Smoke alarms

Ordinary smoke alarms make a piercing, high-pitched sound. If you have moderate, severe or profound hearing loss (especially in the high pitches), or take your hearing aids out before you sleep, an ordinary smoke alarm may not be loud enough to alert you.

To make sure you are alerted if there is a fire, choose a smoke alarm designed for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. These have a vibrating pad that goes under your pillow or mattress and vibrates if the smoke alarm goes off. They also have flashing lights to alert you when you are awake.

Your local fire service can carry out a free home-safety check and may be able to install a smoke alarm for you. Contact your local fire service to find out more.

**Please note: If you have mild to moderate hearing loss, or use hearing aids or a CI, you may be able to hear a smoke alarm when you're awake, but you may not hear it when you're asleep or when you take out your hearing aids or switch off your CI processor.**

## Doorbells

If you have mild hearing loss, you may only need a louder doorbell or one with a different sound that's more suitable for your hearing loss. You may also be able to add an extension bell in one or more rooms if you struggle to hear the doorbell chime because it's too far away. If you have moderate, severe or profound hearing loss, a flashing-light wireless doorbell or pager system may be more suitable.

 See our factsheet *Alerting devices*.

## What can help me communicate online?

Thanks to smartphones and tablet devices (such as iPads), we can now communicate online while on the go, as long as there's an internet connection.

You can get in touch with people using:

- voice and video-calling services such as Skype
- instant-messaging apps like WhatsApp
- social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

There are also apps designed specifically for people who are deaf or have hearing loss or tinnitus (see box, [page 16](#)).

 See our factsheet *Communicating online*.



### NGT Lite

NGT Lite is an app owned by the Next Generation Text (NGT) service, which replaced the Text Relay service. NGT provides the same relay service: relay assistants help people using a textphone to communicate with people using a telephone, and vice versa.

Thanks to the NGT Lite app, you can now use the relay service to make a call over your smartphone, tablet or computer that's connected to the internet – wherever you are. You can speak or type your part of the conversation, and the relay assistant will type the person's reply for you to read. You can also use the app just to text and read messages, like an instant-messaging app.



See our factsheet *Text relay services*.

## What products can help with tinnitus?

Tinnitus is the experience of hearing sound in your ears or head that doesn't have an external source. It's usually described as a ringing sound, but it can be buzzing, roaring, humming, whooshing or clicking. If you have tinnitus, your audiologist or tinnitus specialist may recommend that you use a **sound generator** to distract your brain from paying attention to the tinnitus sounds. This can help to train your brain to 'filter out' tinnitus, so, over time, you are no longer overly aware of it.

Some sound generators look like hearing aids and fit behind, or in, the ear – only audiologists can provide them. They produce a range of soothing sounds, normally including the 'shushing' sound known as 'white noise'.

Other sound generators are known as **tinnitus relaxers** – these are small, table-top sound machines that play recordings of natural sounds, such as the sea, birdsong and rain, to relax you and distract you from your tinnitus.

Your audiology department may provide tinnitus relaxers on loan – if not, you can buy them from online stores, including the Action on Hearing Loss shop: [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusproducts](https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusproducts)

At night, you could try a soft **headband** with wireless headphones inside that you can connect to a Bluetooth-compatible music device. Or you could try a **sound pillow** or **under-the-pillow speakers**, which you can plug into your music device and play sounds to help you sleep.



See our leaflet *Understanding tinnitus*.

## Can I get help with paying for equipment?

- Your local council's sensory services team may be able to provide assistive equipment or help to pay for it. You'll need a referral from your audiologist, so speak to them to find out more or contact your local sensory services team.
- The government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work or for job interviews. Visit [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://gov.uk/access-to-work) or [nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work](https://nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work) if you live in Northern Ireland.
- The Equality Act 2010 (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland) may require service providers – such as hospitals, GP surgeries and education providers – to provide equipment for people who have hearing loss. See our **Your rights** factsheets to find out more.
- If you're in post-18 education, you may be eligible for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) to help pay for any equipment or communication support you need. See our leaflet *Benefits and support services* for more information.

## Where can I get more information?

**Action on Hearing Loss** has a wide range of information on all aspects of deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. We have the latest information on hearing health, hearing aids and cochlear implants, communication support, rights and benefits.

You can also find out about services in your area, becoming a member and receiving our magazine, the latest research developments, and getting involved as a volunteer or supporter.

Visit our website – [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk) – or contact our free, confidential Information Line: call **0808 808 123**, send a text message to **0780 000 0360** or email [information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)

To see our full range of leaflets and factsheets, visit [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/publications](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/publications)

### Information you can trust

The Information Standard certifies us as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. For a list of references for this leaflet, please email [references@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:references@hearingloss.org.uk)

#### Did you find this information helpful?

Please tell us what you think of this leaflet. Did you find it helpful? Could we improve it? Please let us know by emailing [reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk)

If you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create and review information for our website and publications, please let us know.



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# Products to help with hearing loss and tinnitus



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Email [solutions@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:solutions@hearingloss.org.uk)



**Phones**

Shop online at  
[actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop)

\*Applies to all products. Excludes P&P and VAT.

**Action on Hearing Loss** (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

### Questions about deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss?

Contact our free, confidential Information Line:

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

SMS 0780 000 0360  
(standard text message rates apply)

Email [information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)

### Join us

 Action on Hearing Loss

 @ActionOnHearing



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