



HEAR THIS

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LIONS CLUBS DISTRICT 105M 'HEARING FOR ALL CAMPAIGN'

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Common myths about deafness

There are a number of myths about deafness which can cause confusion. I aim to set some of those myths straight for you here.

Hearing aids can restore hearing

● Hearing aids can be a great help to many deaf and hard of hearing people, but they cannot restore hearing that has been lost. About two million people in the UK use hearing aids, but it is estimated that at least a further three million could benefit from them.

While analogue hearing aids merely amplify sound, digital hearing aids are also able to convert it into information that can be "processed" by a tiny computer. In this way, professionals can finely tailor a hearing aid to suit any individual's hearing loss.

Background noise can be a problem, as hearing aids tend to amplify everything. Although digital hearing aids are better equipped to deal with background noise, no hearing aid can cut it out entirely. All aids work best when their wearers are having one-to-one conversations in quiet environments. Yet despite their limitations, hearing aids can make a huge difference to people with hearing difficulties.

Sign language is a universal or international language

● Contrary to popular belief sign language is not international. Sign languages are as diverse as spoken languages. Deaf people in different countries do not use the same sign language, but some sign

languages do have similar structure.

British Sign Language (BSL) was officially recognised by the government in 2003. Deaf people in the UK use various methods of communication but BSL is the most widely used method of signed communication.

Deaf people are good lipreaders

● Many people assume deaf people can understand everything by lipreading. But, as many words use the same lipshapes, no one can lipread everything. This is why lipreaders may welcome other clues to indicate the subject of conversation.

Some people may find it more difficult than others to lipread. How quickly you learn to lipread will depend on your ability, your memory, your degree of hearing loss and how keen you are to learn. How other people speak can also affect how well you lipread.

Many people don't speak clearly and lipreading someone with an unfamiliar accent may be tricky. However, many hearing impaired people do become skilled lipreaders and find lipreading very useful.

If I shout, the deaf person will hear me better

● It's not a good idea to shout at a deaf or hard of hearing person. When people shout they distort their voices and make it more difficult for hard of hearing people to identify words. You can appear to be angry and cause embarrassment if you shout. And the increased volume can actually be

painful for deaf or hard of hearing people, particularly if they wear a hearing aid.

Instead of shouting - or speaking too slowly or exaggerating your lip movements - speak clearly. To speak clearly you should form your words properly and speak at a regular volume. Try to maintain the natural rhythm of your speech. Use plain language if that helps, rephrasing where necessary; but don't oversimplify, as that can appear patronising.

Deaf people only hear me when they feel like it - selective hearing

● Deaf and hard of hearing people may be able to understand what you are saying some of the time, but not always. To many people, this can be confusing.

The reasons vary. Depending on the degree of deafness, a deaf person may be able to hear some sounds at certain pitches, but hear little else. Those who lipread find that lipreading requires intense concentration. That means that someone who relies on lipreading has to concentrate all day long and may not be able to continue when they are tired. Other hard of hearing people use hearing aids. These work best in quiet environments across a distance of no more than 1.5 metres and in one-to-one conversations. If there is noise or several people talking, or even a windy day, the hearing aid user might need the help of assistive devices like induction loops to eliminate background sounds.

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WHY - WHY - WHY, do we have to put-up with this excessive noise ?

I'm sure that a majority of you at some time have been aggravated by the persistence of television programme producers to include excessive background noise in the form of 'music', synthesizers, sound effects and ambient noise.

Earlier this year, as in the previous year, RNID carried out a survey to find out more about what people with hearing difficulties thought about television access in the UK. It had a fantastic response with over 600 people taking part. Of those that took part, more than half have stopped watching a programme because of problems with subtitles. Likewise, a similar number have switched off because of intrusive background noise.

The previous year's survey revealed a similar picture. Three-quarters of participants said they had used subtitles at some time to watch television and 83% said background noise or 'music' affected their ability to hear speech on television.

Astonishingly, although the majority of respondents find background noise to be a problem and inhibits their ability to enjoy a television programme, around 65% have never complained directly to a broadcaster or Ofcom about it - myself included, although that is about to change!

There are many programmes I have sat down to watch only to be confronted with the frustration of being unable to hear the dialogue. Music can be OK when there is no dialogue, although often it can drown the natural environment sounds. It can be documentaries,

drama, wildlife and nature programmes - they all seem to get the same treatment. One programme that immediately comes to mind is *Planet Earth*.

I remember after watching the lead-up previews, how much I was looking forward to seeing this David Attenborough series. I watched the first ten minutes of the first programme in the series and could not stand it any longer. The background noise made it impossible for me to hear the dialogue and it became an unbearable source of discomfort resulting in me leaving the room to enable my wife to watch the programme without hearing the brunt of the anger and frustration that I felt.

This is, of course, just one occasion of many. I do not watch soaps as I do not understand this 'new language' they use!

One programme I do like to watch is *News at Ten*. Although I hate the introduction synthetic 'music', I do like the fact that I can hear most of what is said by the newscasters, who speak impeccable English, without the distortion of background noise - although I wonder - for how long?

The RNID is campaigning for a change. It is listening to what people say and is willing to action better understanding for all people with hearing difficulties. However, it is only one voice and it needs the support of people with hearing loss to 'make a noise' in support of action to prevent irrelevant, intrusive, annoying and unnecessary background noise.

Informing broadcasters exactly

what the problems are and when they occur can have a huge effect on how they provide the service. Together, we can make a difference. We need to ensure broadcasters are fully aware of the importance of the issues facing viewers who have hearing loss. This could be a major project for Lions Clubs. By promoting an awareness campaign, it could increase the profile of Lions. This could be collecting signatures at an event, or better still, holding an event in your local shopping centre, for example. You could ask people what they think about background noise in television programmes. You could ask how it affects them and whether they would support a petition to assist people with hearing loss and support action to enable them to hear dialogue in future television programmes.

If you would like to consider this as a project for your club or if your members would be prepared to put their signature to a petition acknowledging support for a campaign to help people with hearing difficulties, please let me know and I will send you a form to collect the signatures. Every one will count.

It need cost nothing - except a little time and effort - and who knows, if you link it with a membership promotion, you may get a new member!

Remember - 1 in 7 people have some form of hearing loss. If they like what you're doing, they may want to join you!

**Come on - LET'S BREAK THE
SOUND BARRIER - TOGETHER.**