



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

How do I improve my listening and auditory processing skills?

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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Introduction

This leaflet is aimed at people who have had a hearing test which revealed normal to near normal hearing but who continue to struggle to hear in certain environments.

There are four levels to the listening process:

1. Awareness - that you have heard a sound.
2. Discrimination - you can hear there are two sounds and know they are different. For example, 'b' and 'd.'
3. Identification - you can identify that one sound is 'b' and the other is 'd.'
4. Comprehension - understanding what you hear.

Hearing is a passive process (level 1: Awareness above) for example, you can hear and detect a single sound.

Listening is an active process that involves sound filtering and attention (levels 1-4 above) for example, being able to pick out a voice and understand the conversation amongst background noise. Levels 2-4 (above) are collectively known as 'auditory processing'. This is the way the brain interprets sound to enable us to listen effectively.

Listening in noisy environments is more difficult for everyone compared to having a conversation in a quiet room. However, it may be particularly challenging for people who have poor auditory processing.

Poor auditory processing is when people have difficulty with listening, but this cannot be attributed to a hearing loss, so using a hearing aid would not provide help.

“Auditory processing disorder is where listening or memory of what is heard impacts one’s emotional and social well-being. If you cannot hear and understand, you can fail to be heard or understood.” (Dr Angela Alexander)

Other factors such as stress, anxiety or depression, a change in lifestyle (for example, a new job or moving house), a traumatic life event such as an accident or bereavement, and illness can further inhibit a person’s ability to process sounds and speech.

Some common signs of auditory processing difficulties include:

- Difficulty locating where sounds are coming from.
- Mishearing unfamiliar voices for example, accents or new people.
- Mishearing when listening through speakers or when using the telephone.
- Difficulty hearing in noisy environments.
- Taking longer to respond to and process auditory information.
- Poor memory of what has been heard.
- Difficulty hearing and processing music.

Management of auditory processing difficulties

There is no 'quick fix' or 'one size fits all' approach for auditory processing difficulties. However, here are some of ways to make processing of auditory information easier:

- Try to keep calm. Listening is much harder when you feel anxious.
- Be open. Tell the person you are speaking to that you are struggling to hear them; it is likely they will be feeling the same.
- Practice your listening skills. The more we are exposed to noisy/busy environments, the better we are at being able to process multiple sounds and filter out unwanted noise (see 'auditory training' on page 6 for more information).

How to improve auditory processing skills

The following management strategies are recommended.

Communication tactics

- Ask people to get your attention before they start talking to you, call your name first and wait until you are facing them to talk to you.

- Always communicate face to face as lip reading, gestures and facial expressions are all part of listening.
- If you are in a group, ask people to speak one at a time.
- If you do not understand what has been said, ask the speaker to speak slower or to re-phrase what they have said.
- If you are in a busy room, move to a quiet corner.
- Do not avoid situations where you think you might have difficulty hearing. The brain and hearing can get out of practice if you do not expose them regularly.
- Be open, tell the person you are speaking to if you are struggling to hear them.
- Be kind to yourself. No one correctly hears all the time.

Listening requires more than just hearing. Improving other skills involved in listening such as lip reading may help you to follow conversation.

- www.lipreadingpractice.co.uk is a useful and free resource for improving your lipreading skills.
- The ATLA (Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults) website <https://atlalipreading.org.uk/> is a useful resource to signpost you to any local lip reading classes and written information. If you do not have access to the internet, you can contact them via textphone on 07426 559602 or write to them at:
ATLA, 48 East Hill, South Darenth, Dartford, Kent,
DA4 9AN

Auditory training

Auditory training involves a series of exercises that train the brain in taking in information and being able to process it more effectively and efficiently.

Auditory training programmes aim to improve some of the main auditory processing difficulties experiences such as improving your listening skills and your ability to understand speech.

They often involve completing a series of exercises where you actively listen and respond to verbal or non-verbal sounds at varying levels of difficulty.

Auditory training programmes are available online and through apps on your mobile phone. They aim to challenge the auditory system and train your listening skills.

Below are some free auditory training programs available for adults online. A pair of headphones is usually required to access the activities.

Website:

- Brain HQ (www.brainhq.com)

BrainHQ, is an interactive brain training program with specialised exercises for memory, attention, brain speed, people skills, decision-making, and navigation. It aims to improve your overall brain health and cognitive performance.

Apps (for Apple and/or Android devices):

- Ear Gym: This app is aimed at improving 'hearing health.' It offers game-based activities focus on discrimination of sound intensity and frequency, environmental sound identification as well as auditory memory while listening to noise.
- Hearoes: Hearoes is an interactive auditory training app to help familiarise different environmental sounds, and vocabulary and improve auditory feedback and aural training.
- Hear beyond: This app offers activities that test auditory memory, sound identification and localisation, as well as listening in noise.
- WordSuccess: This app is aimed at those wanting to practice listening for word differences in both quiet and noise. You can practice alone, through headphones, or with a friend acting as a 'listening coach.
- Auditory Training (Apple only): This app is aimed at improving auditory processing skills through a series of auditory training activities and tasks.

If you would like to see the positive impacts of auditory training programs for adults who have difficulties with auditory processing, see Dr Angela Alexander's TedX talk on 'Escaping the Hidden Prison of Auditory Processing Disorder.' The talk can be accessed online via the website link below: Angela Loucks Alexander: Escaping the Hidden Prison of Auditory Processing Disorder | TED Talk (<https://www.ted.com>)

Other considerations

- It is ok to ask for something to be repeated. Make people aware you are having difficulty hearing them and ask them to say it again or try to speak more clearly.
- If you use noise cancelling headphones when out in public places, consider allowing background sounds to filter through to learn to focus on the sound you want to listen to and filter out the sounds you do not.
- Be aware of background noise. If you are struggling at a social occasion, and feeling overwhelmed, take yourself out of the environment temporarily, for example, go for a short walk outside to relax for a moment.
- If you are struggling to understand the television or a movie you are watching, use subtitles. While they may be distracting at first, additional visual cues, such as subtitles, will allow you to follow the programme more easily.
- Listening when you have difficulty processing auditory information takes effort and could leave you feeling tired. Make time for yourself and find quiet, resting activities to help you wind down.
- Minimising the background noise or reducing the distance between you and the speaker, if in a meeting or speaking with someone where there is background noise can be helpful.

Where this is not possible you can use a pair of wireless headphones (to receive the sound) and use your mobile phone which acts as a microphone and give this to the speaker. This will help you to focus on the speaker, reduce the surrounding noise and distance.

- If you have an Apple device and air pods, Beats headphones or compatible external microphone, you can use the 'Live Listen' function which enables your iPhone to act like a microphone that sends sounds to your headphones.
- When using other types of headphones, you will need to use a sound amplifier app to convert your phone to function as a microphone.
- For android devices you will need to use the 'sound amplifier' app to convert your phone to function as a microphone. 'Sound amplifier' makes everyday conversations and surrounding sounds more accessible among people who are hard of hearing, using just your Android phone and a pair of headphones.'
- You may be eligible to get additional support for auditory processing difficulties at work via the government funded access to work scheme. For more information see www.gov.uk/access-to-work, telephone: 0800 121 7479 or Textphone: 0800 121 7579
- For information on where to access further help for auditory processing difficulties please see our suggested online resources.

Online resources

British Society of Audiology Specialist Interest Group for Auditory Processing Disorder. <https://thebsa.org.uk/bsa-groups/group-apdi>

Dr Angela Alexander's APD training website:
<https://www.apdsupport.com/>

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Audiology department, York Hospital, Wigginton Road,
York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 726741 or email yhs-
tr.AudiologyAdmin@nhs.net.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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