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## DEAFNESS

### Myths about deafness

## Five common myths about deafness and people with a hearing loss

Please install the Flash Plugin There are a number of myths about deafness which can cause confusion. We set those myths straight for you here.

### 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. But like spoken languages, some sign languages in different countries do have a 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. BSL is structured in a completely different way to English and, like any language, it has its own grammar.

Some people use Sign Supported English (SSE). This is not a language in its own right, but more like a kind of English with signs.

You can read more about BSL in our leaflet - [Sign language\(PDF 368kb, opens new window\)](#).

### Deaf people are good lipreaders

Many people assume deaf people can understand everything by lipreading. But many words use the same lipshapes, so no one can lipread everything. This is why lipreaders may welcome gesture, fingerspelling, sign or 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. However, many people do become skilled lipreaders and find lipreading very useful.

Many people don't speak clearly and lipreading someone with an unfamiliar accent may be tricky. It may be difficult to lipread someone with a beard or a large moustache.

For more information about lipreading read our leaflet, [Learning to lipread\(PDF 145, opens new window\)](#).

## Hearing aids can restore hearing

Hearing aids can be a great help to many people who are deaf or hard of hearing, but they cannot restore hearing that has been lost. About two million people in the UK use hearing aids, but it is estimated that a further four 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. This means that they can be tailored to suit an 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, they cannot cut it out entirely. All aids work best when their wearers are having one-to-one conversations in quiet environments.

You can read more in our factsheets about [how to get hearing aids](#)([external link, opens new window](#)).

## If I shout the deaf person will hear me better

It's not a good idea to shout at someone who is deaf or hard of hearing. When people shout they their voice is distorted, which makes it more difficult for people who cannot hear to identify words. You can appear to be angry and cause embarrassment if you shout. And the increased volume can actually be painful for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, particularly if they wear hearing aids.

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.

Read our [Communication tips card](#)([PDF 387, opens new window](#)).

## Deaf people only hear me when they feel like it

People who are deaf and hard of hearing may be able to understand what you are saying some of the time, but not always. This can be confusing, but there are various reasons why it happens.

Depending on their degree and type of hearing loss, people may be able to hear some sounds at certain pitches, but little else.

Lipreading requires intense concentration. This means that someone who relies on lipreading has to concentrate hard all day and may not be able to continue when they are tired.

Other people with hearing loss 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.

Read our [Communication tips card](#)([PDF 387, opens new window](#)) to find out more.

# Lipreading facts and myths:

## **Myths...**

All deaf people can lipread perfectly.

It's an easy way to communicate.

It doesn't need to be learnt, it just comes naturally.

You need special equipment to lipread.

**None of these are true!**

## **Facts...**

Lipreading involves seeing some of the shapes, hearing some of the sounds, recognising body language and facial expression, and using common sense and guesswork.

You need reasonably good eyesight to lipread.

Not everyone is easy to lipread.

Consonants are easier to see than vowels.

Sentences and long words are easier to lipread than short ones!