

# Products to make life easier

Equipment to improve the lives of people  
who are deaf or hard of hearing

**RNID** • )))

Changing the world for deaf  
and hard of hearing people

We're RNID, the charity working to create a world where deafness or hearing loss do not limit or determine opportunity, and where people value their hearing.

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and you find it hard to hear everyday sounds like the doorbell, you can get equipment to make life easier. Some products can help if you have tinnitus.

In this leaflet we tell you about:

- different levels of hearing loss
- equipment to alert you to different sounds
- equipment that makes it easier to use the telephone
- listening equipment
- equipment to help you with your tinnitus
- where to buy equipment
- help with buying equipment.

And if you need more help, our telephone helplines can give you even more information about equipment (see back cover for contact details). We also tell you about our factsheets and other leaflets that you can order from our Information Line. See the list on page 19.

## Does my hearing loss affect what products I can use?

Yes, you may need different sorts of equipment depending on your level of deafness or hearing loss (see *Where can I buy equipment?* on page 16).

- **Mild deafness**

You have some difficulty following speech, mainly in noisy situations.

- **Moderate deafness**

You have difficulty following speech without hearing aids.

- **Severe deafness**

You rely a lot on lipreading, even with hearing aids. British Sign Language (BSL) may be your first or preferred language.

- **Profoundly deaf**

You are likely to rely on lipreading. BSL may be your first or preferred language.

## Is there equipment to alert me to sounds at home?

Yes. If you have difficulty hearing your doorbell, alarm clock, telephone ringing, baby crying or smoke alarm, you can get equipment to alert you to these sounds. These products use flashing lights, or vibrating pagers or pads, to draw your attention to sounds around the home.

You can either buy these pieces of equipment separately, or you can use a multi-alerting system that draws your attention to a whole range of different sounds or events.

See our factsheet, **Multi-alerting systems**.

**Please note** – no system that relies on a visual trigger alone, such as a flashing light, can be guaranteed to wake you from sleep. We recommend that you use vibration as well as – or instead of – a flashing light to wake you up.



## Alarm clocks

If you cannot hear your alarm clock, try using one with a vibrating pad that goes under your pillow or mattress. Some models also have flashing lights. If you share your alarm clock with a hearing person, you may want to buy one that has an alarm they can hear. You can also get a range of wristwatch alarms that can be set to vibrate.

See our factsheet, **Sensory alerts for the home**.

## Baby monitors

Baby monitors for people who are deaf use a vibrating pad and/or flashing light to draw your attention to your crying baby. You can also get baby monitors that let you see your baby on your television.

See our factsheet, **Sensory alerts for the home**.

## Doorbells

If you have a slight hearing loss, you may only need a louder doorbell or one with a different sound. If you need more help, you could add extra bells to your existing doorbell system and put them in different rooms. Or you can get systems that use a table lamp, flashing strobe light or pager to let you know the doorbell is ringing. Alternatively, you could try a system that makes all the lights in your house flash or dim whenever the doorbell rings.

Some systems are wireless and use radio to send signals to a receiver that flashes, makes a noise or vibrates if the doorbell rings.

See our factsheet, **Sensory alerts for the home**.

## Smoke alarms

Ordinary smoke alarms make a piercing, high-pitched sound. If you have a moderate hearing loss, you may still be able to hear them, but be careful – they may not wake you while you are asleep.

You can get smoke alarms that are designed for people who are deaf to use in the home, such as the RNID smoke alarm. They use vibrations and flashing strobe lights to let you know when they have detected smoke.

See our factsheet, **Smoke alarm systems**. Or contact us for information about installing a smoke alarm system in the workplace.



## Can I get equipment that makes it easier to use the phone?

Yes. If you have difficulty hearing the phone ring, or someone speaking to you on the phone, you can adjust or adapt the phone you already have, rather than buy a new one.

If you find it difficult to hear the phone ringing, check to see if you can turn up the volume of the ringer or change its pitch. Try placing your phone on a hard surface, as this may make the ring sound louder. If you still cannot hear your phone, you could add an extension bell, or a flashing light, in one or more rooms.



A telephone amplifier may also help you to hear what a caller is saying to you. It is either attached to the earpiece of your handset, or fits between the base and handset on a modern corded phone. It only works on phones with the dialling pad on the base unit.

You can also buy phones that let you make the earpiece louder and with a built-in flashing light to attract your attention when the phone rings. And some phones have an inductive coupler in the handset. This means they are hearing aid compatible – you can use the phone with a hearing aid that has a 'T' setting. This should help you hear sound more clearly with reduced background noise.

If you use hearing aids, you should be able to use a corded phone as these are analogue and do not cause interference. Cordless phones, however, are digital and can cause severe interference with some hearing aids, although this is less likely if you have a modern digital aid. Some phones may work better for you than others – so if you can, try before buying.

See our factsheet, **Telephones and voice communications**.

## Textphones

If you are severely or profoundly deaf, you may want to get a textphone. The brand name 'Minicom' is often used to describe any textphone. Textphones have a small display screen and a keyboard, so you can type what you want to say and read what is being typed from another textphone in reply. Some textphones have a voice telephone handset while others are designed to be used with a separate voice telephone.

If you have a textphone, you can call someone else with a textphone directly. If you have a voice telephone and want to talk to someone who has a textphone, or vice versa, you can use RNID Typetalk, the national telephone relay service. You type what you want to say and an operator will relay it to the person on the telephone.

See our factsheet, **Text communications**. Go to [www.typetalk.org](http://www.typetalk.org) for information about RNID Typetalk.



## Mobile phones

Mobile phones come equipped with a range of ringtones to choose from and have an adjustable ringer volume. Many models also vibrate when they ring.

You can use a mobile phone to send SMS text messages. These can be a good way to keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. It can also be useful in emergencies, although you should remember that SMS messages may be severely delayed.

All mobile phones in the UK are digital. Unfortunately, these can cause severe interference with some hearing aids. We strongly advise you – if you can – to try out any mobile phone that you are thinking of buying with your present hearing aids.

If you have or buy a digital mobile telephone that does cause interference with your present hearing aids, you can get add-on listening accessories, such as neckloops and ear hooks, that may let you use your mobile effectively.

See our factsheet, **Mobile phones**.



## Mobile textphones

RNID is currently running a new service that lets you make mobile textphone calls from a range of handsets.

See [www.ictrnid.org.uk/tbtmob.html](http://www.ictrnid.org.uk/tbtmob.html) for details.

Orange allows you to attach a textphone to most mobile phones available on their network.

Go to [www.orange.co.uk/disabilityservices/choosing](http://www.orange.co.uk/disabilityservices/choosing) for more information.

## Home-based SMS systems

You can get a number of products that allow you to send and receive SMS text messages from your home, without having to buy a mobile. These include some digital cordless phones.

## Videophones

Videophones let you see, and talk or sign, to someone at the same time. The picture quality is good enough for sign language communication. However, you may need to sign a little more slowly than usual. It is difficult to lipread using a videophone because the picture quality is not good enough and you may experience a time delay between the sound and picture.

See our factsheet, **Video communications**.

## What is listening equipment?

Listening equipment amplifies sound (makes it louder). You can plug some listening equipment directly into your television or stereo for better sound quality. Other listening equipment is supplied with a microphone, which you can place near the loudspeaker on your television or stereo, or use for conversations. Listening equipment can be used with headphones, a neckloop or ear hooks. If your hearing aid has a 'T' switch or 'T' programme, choose the 'T' setting with a neckloop or ear hook.

## Conversation aid

If you are moderately deaf, you may want to try a conversation aid, particularly if you don't wear hearing aids. It is small, easy to use and ideal in places where you are talking to one other person in a quiet environment.

Most conversation aids have a microphone to pick up speech, an amplifier to make the speech louder, and accessories to reproduce the speech, such as stetcloips, earphones, neckloops, ear hooks, or headphones. Some also have an in-built telecoil for listening via loop systems. More advanced radio microphone systems can also be used to listen at a distance in conferences, meetings or in more difficult listening situations.

## Headphones

Some televisions and nearly all stereos have a headphone socket, so you can plug in headphones, letting you have the sound louder without disturbing other people. Some kinds of headphones, such as over-the-ear and in-the-ear models, are designed for hearing people, but you may also find them useful if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

See pages 14 and 15 for information about cordless infrared and cordless FM headphones.



## What is a loop system?

A loop system can help you to hear sound more clearly if you use hearing aids with a 'T' setting or loop listener, because it helps to reduce background noise. At home, for example, a loop system may be used to pick up sound from your television, hi-fi or radio. You can also fit one in your car. A loop system can be set up with a microphone to help hearing aid users hear conversations in noisy places, such as a post office counter or railway station.

## How does a loop system work?

A loop system converts the sounds it picks up into magnetic inductive signals. When these signals reach your hearing aids or loop listener, they are converted back into sound you can hear.

See our factsheet, **Induction loop and infrared systems**.

## Loops in public places

You will find loops in public places such as theatres and cinemas. Banks and post offices often have loop systems at the counter. You may have seen signs for them, like the one here.



## Fitting a loop system

A loop system consists of a long length of wire, which has both ends attached to the loop amplifier. You can fit a loop system in your home yourself, following the manufacturer's instructions.

## How do I use a loop system?

If you wear hearing aids, you need to switch them to the 'T' setting or loop position. If you don't wear hearing aids, you can still use a loop system, but you will need hand-held, battery-operated listening equipment that has a loop listening facility.

## What is an infrared system?

An infrared system is an alternative to a loop system. The signal is transmitted by invisible infrared light rather than by magnetic field.

### How does an infrared system work?

An infrared system comprises two parts – a transmitter you place near the source of sound (such as a TV set or stereo) and a receiver unit. The receiver may be built into a listening aid. Most commonly, these have short tubes that convey the sound to your ears. However, some types of receiver units have an induction neckloop so you can listen through your hearing aids when on the 'T' setting.

See our factsheet, **Induction loop and infrared systems**.

### Infrared systems in public places

You will find infrared systems installed in venues such as theatres, cinemas and lecture halls. You will be able to collect the listening unit from the reception desk.



## Cordless headphones

Cordless headphones are designed to receive radio or infrared signals from a transmitter connected to a source of sound, such as a TV set or stereo. Because infrared light is blocked by walls, you can only receive infrared within the room in which it is transmitted. Walls, on the other hand, do not stop radio signals – so you can use radio cordless headphones to listen as you move around your home.

See our factsheet, **Listening equipment**.

## What are neckloops and ear hooks?

A neckloop is a small induction loop you wear around your neck. Ear hooks fit over the ear, next to your hearing aids. You need to switch your hearing aid to its 'T' setting, and it will then pick up a signal from the neckloop or ear hooks. You can plug neckloops and ear hooks into the headphone socket on your television, mobile phone stereo or into listening equipment. You may need an extension lead to plug your neckloop or ear hook into the headphone socket.

## Can I get equipment to help manage my tinnitus?

If you have tinnitus, your audiologist may recommend that you use a sound generator as part of a tinnitus management programme. These produce a soothing 'shhh' sound, known as 'white noise'. They may look like hearing aids and only professionals can provide these. Or you can buy bedside sound generators that play sounds such as waves, fountains, birds or rain. Alternatively, you can plug a sound pillow or under-the-pillow speakers into a radio or hi-fi.

Contact the Information Line to find out more (see back page).

## Where can I buy equipment?

Go to our website at [www.rnid.org.uk/shop](http://www.rnid.org.uk/shop) for up-to-date information about some of the products covered in this leaflet. Or contact our Information Line for a copy of our *Solutions* catalogue, which features a range of products for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Can I get help with paying for equipment?

You may be able to get help to pay for equipment. Contact our Information Line for more information about the following:

- Social services may help to pay for, or provide, equipment. For more information, contact your social worker with deaf people or your local social services department.
- The government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work or for job interviews, whether you are employed or unemployed.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) may require service providers, such as hospitals or GP surgeries, to provide equipment.
- If you are a student, you may be able to get help to pay for equipment or your education provider may have to provide it under the DDA.

## Want to know more?

Are you affected by hearing loss or tinnitus? Joining RNID is a great way to keep updated on developments, the new products that can help, details of accessible entertainment in your region, latest information and advice, and much more. You'll also be able to share your experiences of hearing loss with other members.

As a member we'll update you six times a year, through our award-winning membership magazine, *One in Seven*.

If you're retired, membership costs just £15 a year.

## How to join

Complete the form on reverse and send to our Freepost address.

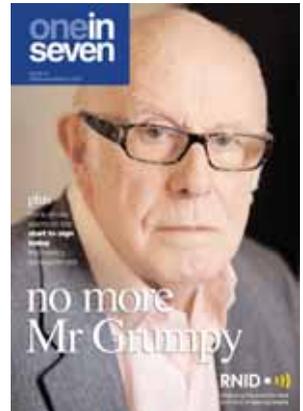
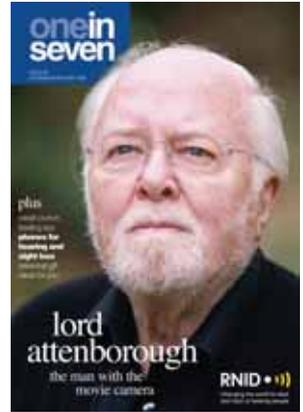
Alternatively:

- visit [www.rnid.org.uk/leafletjoin](http://www.rnid.org.uk/leafletjoin) or
- call **0845 634 0679** (tel/textphone) or
- email [membership@rnid.org.uk](mailto:membership@rnid.org.uk).

Contact us for more information:

Membership Team  
RNID  
19-23 Featherstone Street  
London EC1Y 8SL

Tel/textphone **0845 634 0679**  
[membership@rnid.org.uk](mailto:membership@rnid.org.uk)  
[www.rnid.org.uk/leafletjoin](http://www.rnid.org.uk/leafletjoin)



# Yes, I want to join RNID

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Textphone \_\_\_\_\_

Please accept my membership payment: (tick relevant boxes)

£22 standard rate       £15 if you are retired, unwaged  
or a full-time student

**In addition**, I would like to make a donation of £ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment method:

I enclose a cheque/PO made payable to RNID (delete as appropriate)

I prefer to pay by credit card/debit card/CharityCard (delete as appropriate)

Card number:

Start date: /      Expiry date: /

Issue number (if present):       Security number:   
(last 3 digits on signature strip)

Signature:

Please return this form to:

RNID, FREEPOST LON13186, London EC1B 1AL

Please tick here if you **would like** to receive emails from us including your membership email every two months.

Occasionally, we may want to let you know about the work we are doing. If you would **prefer not** to be contacted in this way, please tick this box.

Occasionally, we will allow other organisations to contact you, but if you would **prefer not** to be contacted, please tick this box.



## Where can I get further information?

You might find some of our other factsheets or leaflets useful.

- **Sensory alerts for the home** (factsheet)
- **Multi-alerting systems** (factsheet)
- **Smoke alarm systems** (factsheet)
- **Telephones and voice communications** (factsheet)
- **Text communications** (factsheet)
- **Mobile phones** (factsheet)
- **Video communications** (factsheet)
- **Listening equipment** (factsheet)
- **Induction loop and infrared systems** – for deaf people (factsheet)
- **Induction loop and infrared systems** – for people managing public venues (factsheet)
- **Getting hearing aids** (leaflet)
- **Tune out tinnitus** (leaflet)

**Please contact the Information Line (see back page) for free copies of these. And let us know if you would like any of them – or this leaflet – in Braille, large print or audio format.**

We're RNID, the charity working to create a world where deafness or hearing loss do not limit or determine opportunity, and where people value their hearing.

There are a number of ways to support us. To find out more:

Go to

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

Information line

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

SMS\* 0780 0000 360

(\*costs vary depending on your network)

Or write to us

[informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk)

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