

Do you hear what I hear?

How simple distractions in your home affect the hard of hearing, and what steps can be taken to eliminate some of the stress

By: Jessica Perreault, Assistant Researcher, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association <http://www.chha.ca>

For the hard of hearing community, the little things make a big difference in daily interactions. What often seems effortless to the hearing community can be twice the challenge for hard of hearing individuals. Even inside the comfort of one's own home, simple interactions become difficult tasks due to a wide range of interferences. With just a few adjustments, however, the home can be turned into a place for all to hear.

While devices such as hearing aids, and cochlear implants significantly improve hearing for many hard of hearing individuals, there are daily interferences that still make it difficult to hear at all. Too much noise, poor acoustics, frequency interference, and even lighting are some of the many things that negatively affect a hard of hearing individual's ability to hear. The following includes some simple steps to take to eliminate some of the stress for a hard of hearing individual in your home.

Lighting

For a hard of hearing individual relying on speechreading, bright light and windows can make it very difficult and distracting to focus their concentration. To ensure maximum visibility, use curtains or blinds to block natural light. Avoid standing in front of a bright window or lamp while speaking, as this makes it difficult to see your lips and inhibits their ability to speechread you.

Acoustics

Rooms with little furniture, high ceilings, no wall or window coverings, or a combination of the above provide poor acoustics. The sound reverberation interferes with the hard of hearing individual's ability to pick up any noise. At the same time, too much furniture can have the opposite affect, allowing the sound to be absorbed too quickly.

Alerts

Things like doorbells, alarms, telephones, etc. are not practical for some hard of hearing individuals. To get around this obstacle consider vibrating or flashing alarms that create alternate non-acoustic emergency alerts. Another alternate method is using hearing ear dogs who work similar as guide dogs for the blind, but are trained to recognize and alert for aural cues.

ALDs (Assistive Listening Devices)

For long term guests, or permanent residents, assistive listening devices such as inductive loop systems, FM systems, and Infrared systems provide solutions to noise interference. While all devices have their pros and cons, ALDs are often effective in aiding television viewing, one on one conversation, group interactions, etc.

Speechreading

For a hard of hearing individual who relies on speechreading, try to avoid the following to ensure the easiest flow of communication. Do not over

exaggerate lip movement, this often distorts the look of your speech. Avoid using slang terms that may potentially be unrecognizable. Do not continue to repeat the same thing over and over if you are misunderstood, try to reword your comments. Be patient, and speak as you would conversing to a hearing individual.

Watch Your P's and Q's

In areas that may potentially be dangerous, avoid situations that could startle. For example, the kitchen or a stairway, avoid coming up from behind. Make your presence known, as you may not always be heard approaching. Avoid conversations from behind, try to eliminate background noise, and speak directly facing the person. This helps avoid potential accidents.

The goal at CHHA is to raise awareness of the hard of hearing community and educate individuals about hearing loss. To learn more about the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, and issues such as accessibility, visit their website at <http://www.chha.ca> or call **Voice:** 613-526-1584 **TTY:** 613-526-2692, **Toll-Free:** 1-800-263-8068 (In Canada Only).

This publication is part of a project funded by "HRSDC – Canada Summer Jobs Program". The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada