

## 5 Emails

### Email 1

#### **Subject: What to do when your partner can't hear**

Dear [Name],

Good communication is the cornerstone of a good relationship. Of course, usually when we talk about good communication in relationships, we talk about sharing your feelings, trying to understand the other person's point of view, and showing an interest in your partner's day. Less often do we talk about the role that hearing plays in a healthy relationship. Yet, hearing loss affects around 45 million Americans, and hearing loss can be a strain on relationships. When one person struggles to hear, both partners can feel frustrated, impatient, and unheard, and it's easy for misunderstandings to develop.

If your partner has hearing loss, one way to better understand them is to walk a mile in their shoes. Or rather, ears. Spend a day wearing earplugs, which simulate mild hearing loss, and see what you experience. By navigating through the world while wearing earplugs, you may notice a few things:

- \* It's awkward to ask people to repeat themselves.
- \* When there's background noise, such as in restaurants, it can be almost impossible to follow a conversation.
- \* When you ask someone to repeat what they just said, they often give you a shortened answer.
- \* Even when you can hear what's going on, it's hard to pick up on nuance.
- \* Without the ability to hear well, some situations may feel dangerous or make you anxious.

After spending some time with earplugs, you may develop a new compassion for your partner's struggles.

The next step is to learn to communicate so your partner can understand. The best way to do this is to visit an audiologist as a couple. An audiologist can teach you how to speak so your partner is more likely to hear you and teach your partner ways to ask for what they need in order to communicate better. With practice, both of you can restore good communication and intimacy.

Next time, join us as we look at situations that are more challenging for people with hearing loss.

## Email 2

### **Subject: Situations that make hearing difficulties worse**

Dear [Name],

If you have hearing difficulties, some environments are more difficult to navigate than others. Here are some situations that can make hearing difficulties worse, as well as some tips that can make them better.

#### Noisy Environments such as Restaurants, Bars and Sporting Events

When you have even mild hearing loss, following a conversation in a noisy place can be almost impossible.

Make it better: Avoid loud restaurants and bars. Many restaurant reviews note sound levels, or try SoundPrint, which is an app for your smartphone that rates the sound level of restaurants and bars. SoundPrint also allows you to measure the noise level yourself, using your phone's microphone.

Link - <https://www.soundprint.co/>

#### Listening without Seeing

When you have hearing loss, your eyes help to fill in information that your ears miss. For that reason, it's important that you speak to people face-to-face.

Make it better: Ask your friends, family and colleagues to avoid:

- \* Talking to you from another room
- \* Speaking with their hands or another object in front of their face
- \* Having important conversations in poor lighting
- \* Speaking at the same time as someone else

Instead, ask them to speak clearly and slowly, while facing you.

#### Fatigue, Illness and Stress

When you have hearing loss, listening requires more effort. If you are already tired, ill, or experiencing unusual stress, it can be even more difficult to follow challenging conversations than usual.

Make it better: While you can't always prevent fatigue, illness or stress, you can ask those around you to be extra understanding of your hearing loss when you are

tired or ill. In addition, try to schedule important meetings and conversations for times of day when you are most likely to be at your best. Finally, taking a few minutes to practice deep breathing can help lower your stress level and refresh your mind any time you are feeling overwhelmed. A simple two-minute break to focus on your breath can be enough to renew your focus.

Next time, stay tuned as we offer tips for telling others that you can't hear well.

### **Email 3**

#### **Subject: Tips for telling others that you can't hear well**

Dear [Name],

It can be difficult to admit that you can't hear well. However, around 20% of Americans have some degree of hearing loss. Odds are, anyone you talk to either knows someone else with hearing loss or has hearing loss themselves.

While it can be awkward, it's important to ask for what you need to communicate well with your friends, family, and co-workers. Here are some tips.

#### **Visit an Audiologist**

If you haven't already met with an audiologist, start there. An audiologist can help you improve your listening comprehension and explain ways to change your environment or use special equipment to make it easier to hear. They can also help you practice asking others for what you need in order to communicate better. Audiologists may also meet with your friends and family directly and help them understand your hearing loss.

#### **Be Clear, Open and Honest about What You Need**

If your family and friends don't know how to communicate clearly with you, they can't do it. Find a calm, quiet place and explain what you need them to do. Suggestions include:

- \* Face you when they are speaking to you
- \* Speak slowly and clearly
- \* Send emails or text messages instead of phoning
- \* Ask them for their understanding if you misunderstand a word or phrase, or don't hear a request

#### **Know Your Rights at Work**

At work, request a private meeting with your boss to discuss your hearing loss, and suggest changes to your work that will help you perform at your best. Your audiologist can help you come up with suggestions that best fit your personal situation.

It's important to note that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. For more information about how ADA applies to your specific situation, call their helpline at 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY).

Link - <https://www.ada.gov/>

Stay tuned for our next edition, when we look at ways to cope with tinnitus.

## **Email 4**

### **Subject: Dealing with tinnitus**

Dear [Name],

Tinnitus is the medical term for ringing (or whistling, buzzing, clicking, roaring, humming, or other noises) in the ears. Tinnitus can be intermittent (coming and going), or continuous. Tinnitus is common, with around 15-20% of Americans experiencing this annoying condition.

Here are some tips for coping with tinnitus.

#### **First, See Your Doctor**

Tinnitus is not a condition; it's a symptom. Just as coughing is a symptom of many illnesses, tinnitus is a symptom of a variety of health problems - including high blood pressure, ear infections, medication side effects, and Meniere's disease. The key to curing or controlling tinnitus lies in an accurate diagnosis and treatment of the underlying problem.

Having said that, in some cases the cause of tinnitus can't be identified. However, your doctor can still offer a variety of treatments to manage your symptoms.

#### **Suppress the Noise**

Several devices can help suppress the noise of tinnitus, including:

- \* White noise machines, which can counteract tinnitus with sounds of ocean waves or wind rustling through trees
- \* Hearing aids, which can help with hearing loss as well as tinnitus
- \* Masking devices, which are small hearing-aid sized devices, worn in the ear, that play white noise to help counter tinnitus

## Medication

Medication can't cure tinnitus, but it can help suppress symptoms and complications. Medications that may be helpful include amitriptyline, nortriptyline, and alprazolam (Xanax). These medications have side effects, so they are only prescribed for serious cases.

## Manage Stress

Stress raises your blood pressure, which can make tinnitus worse. Do your best to eat well, get regular exercise, and try to sleep for 7-8 hours each day. If tinnitus interferes with your sleep, try using a fan or other white noise generator to mask the noise. Mindfulness meditation and breathing exercises may also help release stress. There are many smartphone apps that can teach you to meditate in as little as ten minutes a day.

Join us next time as we take a look at Meniere's disease, an inner ear condition that often causes tinnitus.

## Email 5

### **Subject: Meniere's disease**

Dear [Name],

In addition to the important job of transmitting sounds to the brain, our inner ears also control our balance. Three small, hair-lined, fluid-filled tubes in our inner ear tell our brains where our bodies are in space. As we move, the fluid sloshes around and moves the hairs. Whenever the hairs move, they transmit data to the brain which tells the brain how our body is oriented.

When something goes wrong with this delicate system, we can experience dizziness, vertigo, and nausea. Meniere's disease is one such disorder.

Meniere's disease affects the inner ear and can cause vertigo (the sensation that the world is spinning, which often causes nausea), tinnitus, and hearing loss. In most cases, Meniere's disease only affects one ear, but in a few cases, both ears

can be affected. Meniere's can strike at any age, but it most commonly appears at some point between young adulthood and middle age.

Scientists aren't certain what causes Meniere's disease. The symptoms are likely caused by abnormalities in the fluid that fills the inner ear. The fluid might be affected by a number of conditions, including infections, genetics, and the shape of the inner ear. If the inner ear doesn't allow for proper drainage of the fluids, problems are more likely.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of Meniere's disease include:

- \* Recurring episodes of vertigo lasting from 20 minutes to a few hours (possibly up to 24)
- \* Hearing loss, which usually comes and goes in the early stages of the disorder. Over time, Meniere's disease can cause permanent hearing loss.
- \* Tinnitus, which is a ringing, roaring, whistling, buzzing, roaring, crackling or popping sound in the ear
- \* A sense of pressure or fullness in the ear

In addition to Meniere's disease, these symptoms can indicate a number of health problems. If you have any of these symptoms, it's important that you visit your doctor right away.

While Meniere's is a chronic condition, it's common for episodes to decrease over time. In addition, there are many treatments that can help you manage the symptoms and help minimize the risk of permanent hearing loss.