# Hearing loss home modification checklist

This checklist provides an easy way for people with hearing loss, their families or caregivers to assess problem areas and find solutions.

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Doorbell solutions
Alerting systems use the existing doorbell, a transmitter and a receiver. The alert can be a flashing light or a vibrating signal. Manufacturers of alerting systems include Clarity Alertmaster, Silent Call and Sonic Alert. Alerting systems can be used for numerous environmental sounds, such as a doorbell, smoke detector, telephone, crying baby, etc.

Special doorbells that flash a light or activate a vibrating pager are available. Other devices specifically designed to work with the intercom-type doorbell found in many apartment buildings are also available.

Visual door knock alert devices activate a flashing light when someone knocks at the door (they are sensitive to the vibration). For this to work, the resident must be able to see the door from where she or he sits.

Where to buy: See Vendor list.

Doorbell extenders can be used with the home’s existing doorbell system. They offer adjustable volume and different sounds, and can be placed anywhere in the home (although most must be within 150 feet of the doorbell).

Wireless doorbell systems that includes volume control. Adjustable volume is an important feature for most people who are hard of hearing. Many wireless doorbell systems allow you to add more receivers as needed, so you can place them throughout the house. For best results, place a receiver near where the person with hearing loss prefers to sit.

Where to buy: Larger hardware or home improvement stores.

Smoke detector solutions
There are smoke detectors that use a flashing strobe light, an extra loud audible alarm or a pillow vibrator to alert the person who is Deaf or hard of hearing that the detector has been activated.

Alerting systems work with existing fire and smoke alarms. Alerting systems use transmitters and receivers to alert the user to various environmental sounds such as a smoke detector, telephone, doorbell, crying baby, etc. Manufacturers of alerting systems include Clarity Alertmaster, Silent Call and Sonic Alert.

Hardwired smoke detectors with strobe lights or extra loud alarms need to be installed by an electrician. This is especially important when installing in condominiums or apartment buildings.

Plug in smoke detectors activate a strobe light and/or loud alarm when smoke is detected. They plug into a standard electrical outlet (no electrician needed).

Where to buy: See Vendor list.

Carbon monoxide detector solutions
There are specially modified carbon monoxide detectors that activate a strobe light when carbon monoxide is detected.

Where to buy: See Vendor list.

Weather warning solutions
Some weather radios are designed to allow the user to connect attention-getting devices like strobe lights and bed-shakers.

Where to buy: Electronics stores, electronics catalogs or one of the vendors on the Vendor list.
Security system alarm solutions
First, contact the company that installed the existing security system. Most major companies should be able to adapt the existing system with strobe lights.

It may also be possible to use the existing security system with an alerting system. Alerting systems use transmitters and receivers to alert the user to environmental sounds such as an alarm, carbon monoxide detector, smoke detector, telephone, etc. Manufacturers of alerting systems include Clarity Alertmaster, Silent Call and Sonic Alert.

Where to buy: See Vendor list.

Appliance buzzer and timer solutions
Instead of relying on the appliance buzzer or timer, some people use vibrating wristwatches or portable alarm clocks that also function as timers. Many people also use their smartphones for this purpose. Use these solutions when you start the microwave, oven or dryer.

Where to buy: For vibrating watches and timers, see the Vendor list.

Telephone solutions
The Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program provides specialized telephone equipment, such as amplified phones, amplifiers, ringers and signalers that make it easier to use the telephone. You can use this equipment on a long-term basis at no cost. To qualify, you must have a hearing loss, speech impairment or physical disability that limits the use of a standard phone (including being able to hear it ring) and meet income guidelines. Contact us or visit our website to learn more!

Captioned phones are popular with people who have a hard time hearing on the phone, but use their voice to communicate. Calls are captioned through a free relay service. Spanish speakers can connect with a Spanish-speaking relay operator. You can also download apps so that your smartphone can function as a captioned phone.

Where to buy (if you do not meet the income guidelines): See the Vendor list. Note: Many phones with volume control sold by local stores are not strong enough for people with a significant hearing loss.

Cell phones have a number of useful features for people with hearing loss. Contact a local store that sells cell phones and ask about these features. If you use your hearing aids in the microphone setting when using the phone, look for a cell phone that has an M3 or M4 rating. If you use your hearing aids in the telecoil setting when using the phone, look for a cell phone with a T3 or T4 rating.

Video calling apps, such as FaceTime, Google Duo, JusTalk, Skype and WhatsApp, are a popular

Alarm clock solutions
Alarm clocks designed for people with a hearing loss come in a wide variety of styles and sizes. They have various features such as vibration, strobe lights or extra-loud alarm sounds.

Where to buy: See Vendor list.
way people with and without hearing loss see and talk with friends and family members. Anyone can install these apps on their computers, smartphones or tablets. People with hearing loss who use lip-reading often find it helpful to see the person talking.

People who use sign language to communicate can also use videophone apps, such as Convo, nTouch or Purple. These apps connect to a video relay interpreter, so the person can make calls to people who do not know sign language.

**Where to buy:** The Google Play Store (Android), the App Store (Apple) or the developer’s website. Some apps are free.

**Television, radio or stereo solutions**

Assistive listening devices are a popular and effective solution to this problem, as they reduce or eliminate background noise and amplify speech. There are different types of assistive listening devices, with different earphone and headphone styles. People using hearing aids equipped with a telecoil can use a neckloop with assistive listening devices. For more information about how to use assistive listening devices with hearing aids, contact us.

**Bluetooth** technology sends wireless signals from a microphone or device either directly to the hearing aid, or to a receiver paired with the hearing aid. Many different devices — microphones, smartphones, tablets, hearing aids and more — have Bluetooth technology.

**FM systems** use a radio signal to send sound from the transmitter (which includes the microphone) to the receiver. FM systems can transmit sound from as far away as 100-200 feet. The transmitter can be placed near the television, radio or audio speaker for easier listening. FM systems are portable and easily moved around. The FM system is used in classrooms, at workshops, in places of worship, and many other places and situations.

**Induction loop systems** use a wire installed around the listening area, a microphone and an amplifier. Hearing aids or cochlear implants with a telecoil can pick up the signal directly, or listeners can use a special receiver with headphones.

**Infrared systems** use light waves to send sound from a transmitter to a receiver. The infrared transmitter can be placed near the television, radio or stereo speaker for easier listening. Infrared systems are often used in concert halls, courtrooms, movie theaters and theatres.

**Personal amplifiers** are portable and easily moved. Wireless systems are available that allow you to place the microphone near the sound source, and the speaker/receiver near your ear. Personal amplifiers are also useful for one-on-one conversations, especially in noisy environments such as inside a vehicle or restaurant.

**Where to buy:** See Vendor list.

**Closed captions** can be accessed on most TVs through the television’s menu. Closed captioning is a free service: all televisions manufactured after July 1993 have a built-in decoder chip, and you do not have to call anyone to activate it for you. On some televisions, the captions are simply turned on or off. On other televisions, you may be asked to choose from a list: select CC1 for English captions; select CC2 for Spanish captions (available on some television programs). To watch a DVD with captions, you often need to turn on captions through the DVD menu, where they are listed as “Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.”
Attention-getting solutions
A personal pager can be useful in homes where someone has an illness or physical disability. People also use personal pagers for getting attention during outdoor activities such as hiking or biking. Personal pagers for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing are not activated through a paging service or company, so there are no monthly fees associated with these pagers.

Where to buy: See Vendor list.

Running water solutions
One solution to this problem is to visually check and double-check that water has been turned off. Making little reminder signs to check the faucets before leaving the room or house may also be helpful.

Another solution is to contact a local plumbing supply company for information about spring-loaded handles or electronic eye activated faucets or foot/knee controlled faucets (developed for those with physical disabilities).

Room acoustics solutions
Most people with a hearing loss discover that they are able to hear and understand speech much better in particular rooms of their home. This is because of room acoustics: when sound travels less distance and there are fewer hard surfaces, acoustics are better. Here are some ways to improve room acoustics.

Acoustic wall panels and tiles can be installed on the wall with double-sided tape or hook-and-loop fasteners. With creative use of paint or fabric, acoustic tiles could be an artistic addition to the room!

Home décor can also help in absorbing sound. Tapestries and other wall hangings, and large, plush sofas and chairs will absorb some sound in the room. Carpeting or rugs with cut-loop pile and sound-absorbing padding may also improve acoustics.

Examine windows and doors, if outside noise is a factor. Weather gaskets on the windows may need replacing. Foam gaskets around the frame and/or a drop seal at the bottom of the door may be needed. Heavy draperies may help reduce outside noise as well as indoor noise.

Where to buy: Home improvement stores.

Along with improving room acoustics, using a personal amplifier or FM system may be helpful. See page 5 for more information.
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