

Management for hearing difficulties and Hearing Therapy Services

Patient information

This information is for people who have difficulty hearing, whether or not you have a hearing loss. In this leaflet, you will find information about the management of hearing difficulties, including hearing therapy services available at St Georges University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

When you spoke to your doctor about your difficulty hearing, you may have been referred to the audiology or the ear-nose and throat (ENT) department. You would most likely have had the opportunity to talk a bit about your difficulty and why it's troublesome for you, and you may have had a few tests done, including a hearing test.

Having had your investigations, you may be encouraged to try some strategies to help you with your hearing difficulties. These are often very useful and a good way to help you reduce the impact of your hearing difficulties in your everyday life.

This leaflet will provide you with an overview of these strategies with some additional leaflets included in this pack to give you some more detail on each management option.

Management Options for Hearing Difficulties (with a hearing loss)

Hearing Aids

If you have hearing loss, you will most likely be wearing hearing aids. You will know that hearing aids are limited in what they can do. After all, they are not new ears – they are simply devices that give you a bit of extra sound, but the sound is still going to ears / an ear that isn't working properly. This means that hearing aids will never be as good as normal hearing. Sometimes people struggle with the everyday use of hearing aids and hearing therapy can be a good way to recognise and address these barriers.

One of the main problems people have with their hearing aids is that they struggle in background noise. Everyone finds background noise more challenging but with a hearing loss, it's a lot more

difficult and hearing aids are not able to overcome this. In these situations, sometimes using another device can help. These are called Assistive Listening Devices.

Assistive Listening Devices

There are many Assistive Listening Devices that work together with hearing aids. These are particularly useful when the sound source is compromised, e.g. if there is a lot of noise, or if the sound you want to hear is far away. Your audiologist can talk to you about Assistive Listening Devices. You do not need a hearing therapy appointment if you are interested only in these devices. Simply book an audiology appointment by calling 020 8266 6363 and ask for a review appointment. Your audiologist will then be able to talk you through the options. You can also have a look at the Action on Hearing Loss devices shop, which will give you an idea of the types of devices available. The URL for this is: <http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop.aspx>

Listening Exercises

If you are managing to wear your hearing aids regularly but your audiologist thinks that you are not able to hear as well as they would expect, they may refer you for listening exercises. This is called Auditory Training. You will undergo a full assessment to determine where your main difficulties are, and you will be given exercises to make the most of the hearing available to you, if that is appropriate. Most of the work is done by you and is carried out in between therapy sessions. Sometimes auditory training is not going to improve your discrimination. If this is the case, you may be suitable for additional counselling for hearing loss.

Counselling for hearing difficulties with a hearing loss

Some people need a bit of extra support while they learn to manage their hearing loss. At St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust, we offer a hearing therapy service for people who need some extra input. Please see 'What is Hearing Therapy' below, for more details.

Management Options for Hearing Difficulties (without a hearing loss)

Assistive Listening Devices

Assistive Listening Devices are used to increase a target sound. They are particularly useful when the sound source is compromised, e.g. if there is a lot of noise, or if the sound you want to hear is far away.

Listening Exercises

For some people, listening exercises can be quite useful in teaching your brain to work with complex sound signals a bit more effectively. There are different types of listening exercises and your hearing therapist will explain these to you in more detail.

We also encourage you to find other ways of getting the information you have missed, instead of simply asking someone to repeat themselves. It can be useful to confirm what you think you've heard, or ask them to say it using different words – this can often give you the information that you had missed previously.

Counselling for hearing difficulties without a hearing loss

Some people need a bit of extra support while they learn to manage their hearing difficulties. At St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust, we offer a hearing therapy service for people who need some extra input. Please see below for more details.

What is Hearing Therapy?

Hearing Therapy is part of the greater audiology department. People get referred to hearing therapy for help with a range of problems, including adjusting to having hearing difficulties, maximising hearing, tinnitus (noises in the ears or head) and hyperacusis (oversensitivity to sound).

What does therapy involve?

The hearing therapist's role is to support you while you try to find a way of coping with your difficulties. This may involve some strategies, such as the use of sound, but it may also involve a counseling-based approach, where you are offered support to find ways of coping with your hearing difficulties.

How many times do I need to see someone?

An important part of the process is your assessment. This will happen first. You may be asked to fill in some questionnaires and then to discuss your difficulties in detail with the therapist. The main focus of the assessment is to get an understanding of how you are currently managing and what your needs are.

Once your assessment is completed, you will spend some time setting goals for therapy and deciding how you can work together with the therapist to achieve your goals. You are encouraged to participate fully in this so it helps to consider your goals before this session.

Having decided on a management plan, you will meet fairly regularly with your therapist to work towards your goals. The number of sessions and how far apart they are depends very much on each individual's situation. Typically, you can expect anything from 2 to 10 sessions, although some people need just the one session. The maximum number of sessions is 10.

How to get an appointment

You can be referred by your ear, nose and throat (ENT) consultant, audiovestibular physician or audiologist. You can also be referred by your GP as long as you have recently seen an ENT consultant or audiovestibular physician.

Once you are referred, your letter is read by the hearing therapy team and passed on to the central booking service, who will send you an appointment. Please note that there is a waiting list for appointments.

If you decide that hearing therapy is not for you, please cancel your appointment. Please note that if you do decide not to proceed with hearing therapy, this does not affect any appointments you may have with audiology and/or your consultant.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, you can contact:

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Ground floor
Lanesborough Wing
St George's Hospital
Blackshaw Road
Tooting
SW17 0QT

Telephone: 020 8725 1151 (enquiries)

e-mail: stgh-tr.hearingtherapy@nhs.net

Note: this form is under review and is subject to change following recommendations from the Patient Information Group