



Caregiver Tip of the Month – May 2012

Notes from Area Agency on Aging of North Idaho

Hearing Loss and Aging

An estimated 1/3 of Americans 65-74 have hearing problems and half of those 85+ have hearing loss, missing out on talks with friends and family, misunderstanding telephone conversations and even doctor's instructions, causing anxiety, embarrassment and isolation. It's also easy for friends and family to think they are confused, uncaring, or difficult, when the problem may be that they just can't hear well.

Hearing loss can be age related (Presbycusis), caused by damage to the inner ear, auditory nerve or hearing pathways in the brain. Loud noise, heredity, head injury, infection, illness, certain prescription drugs, and circulation problems as well as allergies can cause the problem. A ringing, roaring, or other noise inside the ears (Tinnitus), can accompany hearing loss. Medicines may help. Maskers, including music, can use sound to make tinnitus less noticeable. A hearing aid makes the sounds you need to hear louder. You can often try out several types so that you can purchase an aid that has only the features you need. There are telephone amplifiers, TV listening devices, devices available at churches and public performances, as well as alerts with blinking and vibration to alert you to phones, door bells. Conductive hearing loss is when ear wax, fluid in the middle ear, abnormal bone growth, a punctured eardrum, or a middle ear infection blocks the sounds carried from the eardrum to the inner ear. It also helps to avoid things that might make tinnitus worse, like smoking, alcohol, and loud noises.

Some tips you can use when talking with someone who has a hearing problem:

- Face the person. Talk clearly, at a reasonable rate. Maintain eye contact and do not hide your mouth, eat or chew gum
- Stand in good lighting and reduce background noises. Touch a hand or shoulder to gain their attention and use facial expressions and gestures as clues.
- Repeat yourself if necessary, using different words.
- Talk with the person, not about the person, when you are with others, to keep them from feeling alone and excluded.
- Be patient; stay positive and relaxed. Ask how you can help

If you have trouble hearing, suggest some of the above.

Area Agency on Aging provides services, supports and information on local resources all year long to support the older population. Contact Betsy Bullard, Area Agency on Aging, at 667-3179, ext. 222, or email infoassist@aaani.org to find out more about these topics and other resources or visit our website at www.aaani.org.

For More Information

Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

1720 Westgate Dr., Suite A
Boise, ID 83704
Toll-free in Idaho: 800-433-1323 Voice
Toll-free in Idaho: 800-433-1361 TTY

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)

NIDCD Information Clearinghouse
National Institutes of Health
31 Center Drive, MSC 2320
Bethesda, MD 20892-2320
Toll-free: 800-241-1044
TTY: 1-800-241-1055,
www.nidcd.nih.gov

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