



Increasing Social Engagement For Individuals with Hearing Loss Best Practices

Summary

Homecare industry professionals instinctively understand the link between social engagement and better health. Clients with hearing loss naturally experience fewer opportunities to connect with others, and this complication can exacerbate a host of physical and mental issues. Hearing loss can trigger anger, loneliness, frustration, mistrust of others and problems with intimacy. Feelings of isolation can also create deeper issues. "The strong, positive temporal link between measured hearing loss and hearing handicap in the current study reinforces previously published data that have shown significant links between hearing (loss) and depression, reduced independence and a greater risk of mortality," according to a study by the International Journal of the British Geriatrics Society¹. With the right intervention, some issues could possibly be alleviated or even avoided completely. Caregivers can make a difference with the following best practices, which increase social engagement and stimulate brain health, ultimately helping clients live longer and better lives.

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Understand hearing loss

Adults with hearing loss are at a higher risk of experiencing increased social engagement restrictions over time. Those with hearing loss often do not receive “full” information, leading to difficulties in communication no matter where they go—work, home, church, or social events in and outside the home. Clients who are socially isolated are also at greater risk of developing cognitive deterioration and dementia. A study from the *Annals of Internal Medicine* concludes that severe—and even moderate—cognitive impairment can increase risk for mortality².

Homecare professionals should prepare themselves to assist patients with hearing loss in innovative ways. This begins with patient consultations when caregivers are gathering information to create a personalized plan of care. Agency administrators should empower employees throughout the organization to take positive action on behalf of their clients. Encourage staff to think of ways to improve engagement for clients. This means that management must remain open to new and “outside the box” ideas and suggestions. Good ideas can come from a variety of places. Consider a rewards system for implementation of successful ideas that come from nurses and aides.

The next step is to advocate for including social engagement enhancement in physician treatment plans. This vital element of health is not customarily included. It may seem daunting, but agencies can encourage change in their communities. Speak with physicians to increase awareness and action. Gathering ideas from a variety of health care professionals can lead to innovation. It doesn't take a formal order from a physician to incite change. Families can play an integral role in success as well. Provide them with information/training so they are integrated into the treatment plan. Family buy-in can also influence the physician. If caregivers see that a client is suffering from undiagnosed depression or social isolation it is imperative that those symptoms be discussed with the family and the doctor.

Take practical action

Homecare providers can follow practical tips to enhance social engagement for clients with hearing loss. Begin by encouraging patients to embrace opportunities available to them. Each patient presents varying but unique causal factors, so customized recommendations are necessary. It is crucial that they exercise (to the extent they can) the mind and the body. Here are some ideas for caregivers:

- 1. SUPPORT HOBBIES.** Hobbies provide the chance for learning, engagement and simple enjoyment. Hobbies can ward off depression and act as a stress reliever. Even art projects and other single-person activities can promote creativity and provide a valuable outlet. Regardless of the individual choice, pursuing a new hobby can instill confidence..
- 2. PLAY GAMES.** Dozens of websites offer ideas for games that individuals with hearing loss can enjoy with their family and friends. One-on-one games like

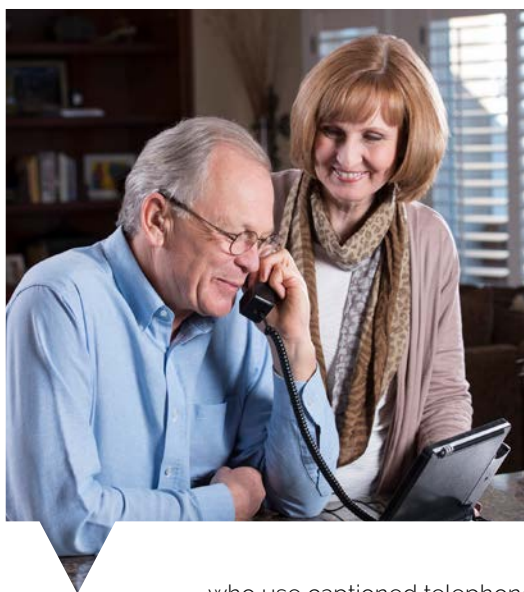


People with hearing loss benefit from early identification; use of hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive devices; captioning and sign language; and other forms of educational and social support.

– World Health Organization,
March 2018

checkers and chess can be good choices, along with big crowd pleasers such as “Apples to Apples” or charades. Any game can foster community and provide the opportunity to connect.

- 3. URGE READING.** Reading the news connects patients to the world, while reading for pleasure promotes cognitive development and social skills. According to the BBC, reading increases a sense of achievement, confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness³. Help clients locate books and magazines that interest them.
- 4. ENCOURAGE EXERCISE.** Even limited exercise can improve health and mood. Studies suggest a link between inactivity and hearing loss⁴, another reason to help patients get moving. Devise suitable exercise plans for patients based on their abilities and limitations. Walking is one activity in which most people can participate—a late afternoon walk is especially beneficial to some with dementia. Gardening, dancing, performing household activities or taking a trip out of the house can all provide helpful physical activity. Since exercise releases feel-good endorphins, even light activity can fight depression and anxiety.
- 5. WATCH THE DIET.** In some cases, a change in diet could cause hearing loss. Deficiencies in vitamin B12 and folic acid “can impair hearing by as much as 39 percent,” according to hearingwellnessctr.com. The deficiencies harm the nervous and vascular systems and may damage the coating over the cochlear nerve. Foods high in inflammation-causing properties should be avoided—such as vegetable oils, high fat meats, sugar, and sodium. Helping clients with their nutrition can lead to better health and a stronger feeling of well being. Referring patients to a nutritionist may be one option to encourage healthy eating.



6. PROMOTE MEDITATION. Any reflection, mindfulness or prayer time can be beneficial. Studies show that prayer and meditation improve patient outcomes and outlooks⁵. A study by the Max Plank Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences showed that “after an eight-week course of mindfulness practice, the brain’s ‘fight or flight’ center, the amygdala, appears to shrink. This primal region of the brain, associated with fear and emotion, is involved in the initiation of the body’s response to stress,” according to Scientific American⁶. As a result, researchers say, the areas associated with attention get stronger. Patients can improve memory and fight depression through meditation and prayer.

Recommend appropriate technology

Hearing aids and personal amplifiers are available for a range of patients, but these don’t always help those with profound hearing loss on their own. Other technologies and services can fill the gap for those who would most benefit from additional social engagement. “Residents in senior living communities

who use captioned telephones are less likely to experience the adverse effects of loneliness,” according to a study reported by the LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST). Common sense suggests that the same is true for at-home clients.

The telephone allows for making connections; however, for individuals with hearing loss that may not be possible through traditional means. Services like Hamilton® CapTel® allow clients to make and receive calls, delivering word-for-word captions of everything said on the phone. The use of captioned telephone technology increases homecare staff efficiencies, according to CAST. Clients gain clarity, and calls are less likely to be repeated. Additionally, calls made with family, friends and the community provide peace of mind and strengthened relationships.

Other helpful technologies include doorbells and clock alarms for those with hearing loss. Doorbells can

flash, vibrate, or offer video and two-way communication. Alarms often provide a vibrotactile feature that shakes the bed as part of the alert system. The ability to wake as needed keeps clients in sync with their natural circadian cycle, further benefiting their overall health.

Extend social networks

Assist clients in recognizing and extending their active social network, taking positive action to combat depression and mental decline. Caregivers should be empowered to make regular or frequent check-in calls to clients with captioned telephones. A regular call schedule can give patients feelings of confidence and provide much-needed conversation. Discussions about their progress and needs show a deeper level of care. It is difficult to underestimate the important role the caregiver plays in a client's social network.

Help family members understand the potential impact of ongoing communication with their loved one. Just as professional caregivers can establish a regular call schedule, family members can develop their own call plan. Of course, visits are welcome. The more social activity; the more the engagement; the better overall prognosis. When family members live far away, amplified and captioned telephones become even more crucial to communication success for those with hearing loss.

Another idea is to encourage organized social activity and volunteering. Research shows that for every social group a senior stops participating in, their quality of life drops by as much as 10 percent over a span of six years, according to *HomeCare* magazine⁷. Remaining active in social networks enhances feelings of well being. "It's often necessary to assist seniors in researching, identifying and evaluating social groups and volunteer opportunities that best fit their age, interests and physical abilities. Utilize your network of contacts to uncover more opportunities for them," said the same *HomeCare* article. Helping clients find and engage in interest-based social groups is an extra step that can make the difference in longevity.

Conclusion

With these best practices, caregivers can provide patients with dignity and a variety of opportunities for social engagement. When acting as an educational and support resource to clients and their families, caregivers create a true "care team" for their patients. Thus, clients coping with the complications of hearing loss can achieve a greater quality of life and live longer. Perhaps most importantly, you have played a vital role in improving their lives.

The Hamilton CapTel phone requires telephone service and high-speed Internet access. Wi-Fi capable. Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS) is regulated and funded by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and is designed exclusively for individuals with hearing loss. To learn more, visit fcc.gov. Hamilton is a registered trademark of Nedelco, Inc. d/b/a/ Hamilton Telecommunications. CapTel is a registered trademark of Ultratec, Inc.

9 Common Signs of Hearing Loss

Homecare professionals can play a role in identifying patients with hearing loss. Once the loss is identified, treatment can begin. As with most medical issues, the sooner the diagnosis, the better. Here are nine common signs of hearing loss, from dailycaring.com.

1. **Having a problem hearing over the telephone**
2. **Having trouble following conversation**
3. **Turning up the TV volume too high**
4. **Having trouble hearing in places with a noisy background, like in a restaurant**
5. **Complaining of dizziness, pain or ringing in the ears**
6. **Frequently asking people to repeat themselves**
7. **Complaining that others mumble or don't speak clearly**
8. **Misunderstanding what people say**
9. **Having trouble understanding when women or children talk**

If you or an employee believes a client has undiagnosed hearing loss, report it to their physician, and cite the signs that are present.



1. <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/41/5/618/47025>
2. <http://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/747121/does-cognitive-impairment-increase-risk-death-older-adults>; <https://hearingwellnessctr.com/nutrition>
3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/tutors/using-skillswise-as-a-tutor/reading-for-pleasure>
4. <https://www.audicus.com/the-benefits-of-exercise-for-hearing-loss/>
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2802370/>
6. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/what-does-mindfulness-meditation-do-to-your-brain/>
7. <https://www.homecaremag.com/aging-place/april-2018/6-ways-alleviate-senior-isolation>