

How to Find Hearing Loss-Friendly Physicians

By Shari Eberts

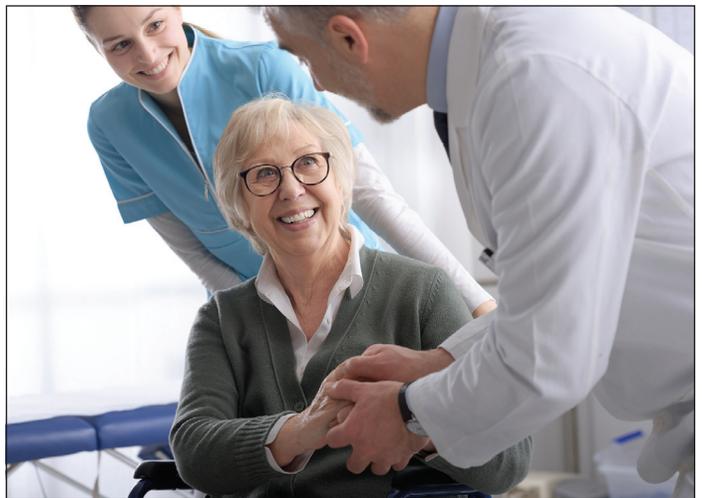
For people with hearing loss, going to the doctor can pose a stressful communication challenge. A mumbling receptionist can make it difficult to check in for an appointment and hear one's name being called when the doctor is ready. In the examination room, doctors are often multitasking, taking notes with their backs turned while they ask questions or discuss a patient's medical condition. This doesn't work for someone who has hearing impairment and uses lipreading to augment his or her hearing. Surprisingly, these scenarios can even happen during visits to an audiologist or a physician for a hearing-related issue. When you have hearing loss, advocate for yourself to get the most out of every doctor's appointment. Follow these tips to get the health care you deserve.

1. Discuss your needs upfront. When setting a doctor's appointment, make sure to say that you have hearing loss and request any available accommodations. You will learn a lot simply by observing the reaction to your request. Unfortunately, some doctor's offices—even those related to hearing—do not offer any hearing assistance either at the reception or during the appointment, where a portable loop or simple pocket-talker device, for example, could make all the difference.

2. Bring your own devices. Wear your hearing aids and bring whatever assistive listening devices you have such as a Roger pen, simple FM system, or free speech-to-text smartphone application like Google's new Live Transcribe.

3. Start your appointment with a reminder of your hearing loss. When you arrive at the doctor's office, remind the receptionist about your hearing loss and request that he or she speak slowly while facing you. If an accommodation is available that you think would be helpful, request to use it. Ask the office staff to alert you with a tap on your shoulder when it is your time to see the physician. In the exam room, tell the doctor about your hearing loss and your communication preferences.

4. Provide real-time feedback, both positive and negative. Thank the receptionist, staff, and physician for utilizing any accommodation and/or speaking in a way that you can hear. Positive feedback often leads to continued constructive



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behavior. If they drift away from communication best practices during the appointment, provide a gentle nudge back to the right direction. Several reminders may be necessary, so rather than getting frustrated, stay focused on doing what it takes to get the important health information that you need.

5. Make a Communication Action Plan (CAP). Complete a CAP (bit.ly/CommAccessPlan), which details the ways that physicians and clinic staff should best communicate with you, and share it with your health care providers. A CAP lists the hearing devices you use and services you need to communicate better. Your CAP should be kept in your medical record for easy access at each doctor's appointment, but bring a copy with you in case the clinic's copy gets misplaced. Read this Guide For Effective Communication in Healthcare (<http://bit.ly/2GYj4ue>) by the Hearing Loss Association of America to learn more about a CAP.

6. Ask for important details in writing. Medical information can be confusing and full of jargon. Request the physician to write down key information, including any required medication and dosage. Bring along a pad and pen for this purpose. Clarify the details for your next appointment in writing or request a confirmation email. Review all insurance/billing information in writing and ask for clarification when needed.

When you have hearing loss, self-advocacy in a medical setting is critical. It can be frustrating when physicians and their staff do not use best practices in communication or do so for a brief period, then revert back to ways that are challenging to you. However, don't stay silent. Advocate for yourself—always politely—to ensure that you get optimal health care. If your current physician and/or clinic staff is unresponsive to your communication needs, start looking for a new one. 



Ms. Eberts is a hearing health advocate, writer, and avid Bikram yogi. She blogs at LivingWithHearingLoss.com, and serves on the board of trustees of Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). She has an adult-onset genetic hearing loss and hopes that her story will help others to live more peacefully with their own hearing issues. Connect with her on Facebook and Twitter.