

difficulties and gradually losing the ability to hear completely it is referred to as late deafness.

### What can cause sudden or late deafness?

Sudden or late deafness can be caused by many things: diseases (e.g. meningitis), use of certain medication (certain antibiotics) traffic accidents, a fall down the stairs or noise. Often the cause of sudden deafness is unknown.

### The Sudden Deafness Foundation

The Sudden Deafness Foundation was founded in 1989, its mission is to look after the interests of sudden or late deaf people with or without CI (cochlear implant), by stimulating deaf people to be independent and to help them reintegrate in the 'hearing' society.

### What does the Sudden Deafness Foundation do?

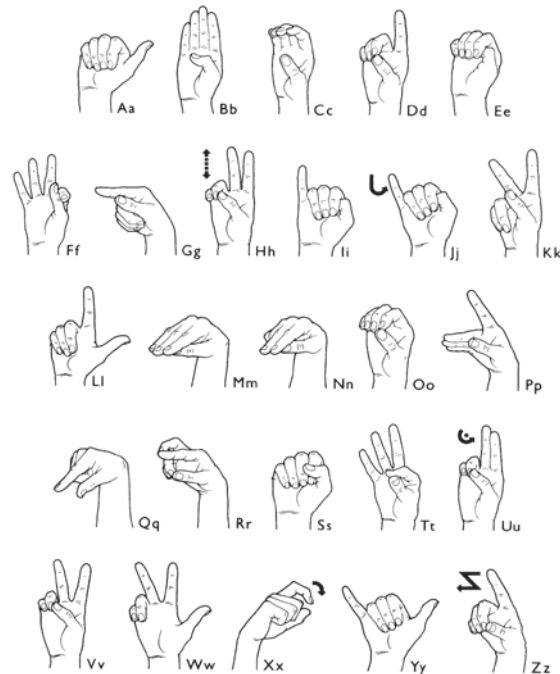
The Sudden Deafness Foundation....

- Informs and advises people who become deaf suddenly or in a later stage in life.
- Provides care and, if necessary, puts you in contact with other organizations.
- Stimulates research into the cause of sudden deafness.
- Provides and spreads information about sudden deafness.
- Stays in contact with organizations that can improve the interests of deaf people.
- Organizes national contact days.
- Has regional units and activities
- Publishes a contact magazine.

### More information?

For more information you can contact the Sudden Deafness Foundation at the address on the back of this leaflet.

## THE DUTCH SIGN ALPHABET



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# Suddenly or slowly losing your ability to hear..... what to do?



## Suddenly or slowly losing the ability to hear...

When you are born with normal hearing and suddenly or slowly you are becoming deaf, there are large consequences. It will influence many parts of your life. People who suddenly, or in a later stage in life, become deaf are cut off from the world. Communicating the way they used to is not possible anymore, not even with hearing aids.

## The consequences

Suddenly the life you used to have, the life of working, studying, friendships, hobbies and other activities, has become unsteady. Communication is the basis of many activities, sometimes even more than we realize. A person who becomes deaf, either suddenly or in a later stage in life, and does not have another way of communicating can get isolated from the world.

It can be frightening not to hear your own voice. Even the sounds of daily life have suddenly gone. You are no longer able to hear traffic noises, casual conversations of colleagues in the corridors, the sound of housemates, all those little sounds that tell you what is happening around you. This can make you feel alone and separated from the world. Often, especially in the beginning, a person who suddenly becomes deaf, or becomes deaf later in life, will be misunderstood. Deafness is not visible, the voice of the person sounds 'normal' to others, so people do not take deafness into account. Often there is a lack of understanding and people just do not believe it. Not hearing something is often interpreted as not understanding something, as being slow, not being 'normal'.

## How to handle it?

Does being deaf mean that your life is over? Does everything stop? Are you afraid to go outside because you feel separated from the world? Are you afraid to

go into stores because you cannot hear what they are saying? Are you afraid to go to parties or visit friends because you cannot follow the conversations? Do you think that working is not possible anymore?

## Dealing with deafness

When you have just become deaf it will seem like you are only losing many things. It could make you desperate and cause panic. Suddenly your life is not like it was before anymore. Sometimes it is hard to put things in perspective. It will take time to learn how to deal with (sudden) deafness. Not only for the deaf person him or herself but also for the people around them. It will require a lot of patience from both sides, especially in the beginning.

## Resources and devices

There are a few organizations who can provide help. In addition, contact with people with the same experience can also be helpful. To support communication there are communication- and sign language courses. Devices such as text telephone, fax, vibration receiver or flashlight signs, a light alarm and sign language interpreters can be helpful. A cochlear implant can offer a new 'hearing perspective'.

## Change of activities

Many people who became deaf suddenly or in a later stage in life discover other ways of communication after a while, or they find new hobbies or activities in which hearing does not play an important role. They will also find that there are still a lot of things that are still possible. Of course, there will be things that you cannot do anymore, but then there are other things that can be done, although sometimes just in another way.

Sometimes it will be difficult to deal with, and communicating will always be very hard work.

## Communicating with deaf people

Below you will find some tips to make it easier to communicate with deaf people.

- Always look at the deaf person if you want to talk to him or her.
- Make sure you have the attention of the person before you start talking. Make sure he/she can see you or just tap him/her on the shoulder to get his/her attention.
- Do not approach a deaf person unnoticed from behind.
- Keep your mouth/face visible, avoid things like cigarettes while talking. Do not put your hand or a cup in front of your mouth.
- When there is bad light a deaf person cannot see what you are saying. Make sure the deaf person does not have to look into the light.
- Talk clearly and not too fast. Articulate but do not overact.
- Do not shout because it will not help.
- Be clear and direct. Tell what you want to say briefly and in clear terms.
- Do not get angry or embarrassed when the deaf person does not understand you right away. Repeat what you were saying, if necessary in other words.
- Write down (if necessary) words that can be difficult like addresses, numbers, names.
- Do not say: 'never mind' or 'it's not important'. When you say that you decide what is important. The deaf person would want to decide that for himself/herself.
- A deaf person cannot adjust his/her volume of voice to the surrounding sound level. You can ask the person to lower or raise his/her voice if necessary.

## What is sudden or late deafness?

Sudden deafness means losing your ability to hear in a short (sudden) period of time. When a person loses his/her hearing after first having a period of hearing