



Enjoying Television When You Have a Hearing Loss

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

3951 Pender Drive, Suite 130 • Fairfax, VA 22030

703-352-9055 (V) • 703-352-9056 (TTY) • 703-352-9058 (FAX)

www.nvrc.org • info@nvrc.org

As you lose some of your hearing, you may want to turn up the volume on your television set in order to understand your favorite actors or newscasters. Or you may stop watching television because it has become difficult or impossible to understand them. Neither option is a good one.

There are two ways you can improve your enjoyment of TV. One is to use amplification to bring the sound to you without disturbing others who are in the room with you. The other is to use closed captioning, which puts text with the words being spoken and sometimes other information on the screen.

AMPLIFICATION

Some great technology can make it possible for you to enjoy TV without making your family, friends and neighbors miserable. Personal assistive listening devices (ALDs), special purpose radios, and the audio output jacks on the back of some TV sets are all useful for amplifying sound.

1. Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

With ALDs, a microphone may be placed directly in front of the TV loud-speaker or the ALD may be connected to the TV's audio output. You wear a receiver which allows you to control the level of sound coming from the microphone. The receiver is used with something that fits in, on, or near your ear, such as headphones or an earbud. If you have a hearing aid with telecoils, you can use a neck loop, chair pad, or other audio induction technology. See our fact sheet on Assistive Listening Devices for more information.

2. Radios

You can also buy a radio to receive the audio output from local television stations. Using a headset or placing the radio near your ear, you can adjust the volume to meet your needs. The major drawback to this approach lies in the radio's inability to pick up cable channels.

3. Audio Output Jacks

Some TVs and VCRs have audio output jacks. These can be used with amplifiers and headsets to control the volume level. If you are the only person watching TV, this will make it possible to adjust the volume to the level that is best for you.

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Finding These Devices

The Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (NVRC) has a Technology Demonstration Room with examples of listening devices you can use with a television. NVRC also has information about businesses that sell them. It is helpful to talk with other individuals who have hearing loss to ask about what devices they like and what companies they trust or received good services from. NVRC can give you information to contact the local chapters of Hearing Loss Association of America (formerly Self Help for Hard of Hearing People), and Association of Late-Deafened Adults.

Several companies issue catalogs containing hundreds of assistive devices. You may order directly from them. Some have an 800 number and will send a free catalog upon request. Buying a replacement item through a catalog may be satisfactory, but the initial purchase of a device through the mail may not be a good idea. You will want to have an opportunity to test the equipment and be able to easily return it if it does not meet your needs. No single product works for all people with hearing loss. Always ask about return policies before purchasing devices.

CLOSED CAPTIONING

Closed captioning began in the early 1980s. Viewers bought and installed a decoder box on top of their televisions to show text of what was being said on the bottom of the screen, much like the subtitles on films. After 1993, all new television sets 13 inches or larger were required to have the closed captioning decoder chip built into them. Check your user's manual to see how to activate this feature.

Closed captioning is a very popular technique for watching TV. It is also used as an aid in teaching English to non-English speakers and in teaching reading skills to children. Closed captioned programs are usually identified in program guides with "CC", or a symbol that looks like a box with a tail. Federal regulations have required increasing amounts of captioning for new programs and 'reruns', with some exemptions such as short commercials, programs between 2 and 6 am, and new network programs.

Most new videotapes and DVDs of popular movies are closed captioned. Check the video box or DVD cover closed captioning. DVDs also often have subtitles, which are helpful but may not have as much information as closed captions do.

Unfortunately there are few closed captioned educational videos or DVDs, but deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind individuals can borrow a variety of free educational media from the Described and Captioned Media Program. They currently have more than 4,000 titles. You can find them at www.dcmp.org or call 800-237-6213 V; 800-237-6819 TTY or 800-538-5636 FAX.