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Dear Savvy Senior,

Can you direct me to some resources for my hearing-impaired mother? She doesn't realize her hearing has gotten as bad as it has, so I'm looking for some affordable ways to help. Any suggestions?

Loud Talker

Dear Loud:

More than 31.5 million Americans today, two-thirds of whom are over age 55, have hearing loss, but fewer than half ever seek treatment. Here are some tips that may help.

### **Hearing Loss**

Being aware of hearing loss as you grow older is important because impaired hearing can have a negative impact on your quality of life. In fact, studies show that older people with hearing impairments often withdraw, become depressed and may even die before their time. Because hearing loss usually develops over years, many people aren't aware of the extent of their loss until family or friends bring it to their attention. Here's a simple test to help your mom see where she stands:

- + Does she have trouble hearing when talking on the telephone?
- + Does she listen to TV at a high volume level?
- + Does she frequently ask others to repeat themselves?
- + Does she have difficulty understanding people in groups or in noisy situations?
- + Does she have difficulty understanding women or young children?
- + Does she have trouble knowing where sounds are coming from?
- + Is she unable to understand when someone talks to her from another room?
- + Does she avoid family meetings or social situations because she "can't understand"?

If she answered yes to three or more of these questions, she may have a hearing problem and should see an otolaryngologist, a doctor who specializes in ear, nose and throat disorders (see [www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org) to locate one in your area) or an audiologist ([www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org)) for a hearing evaluation.

## **Hearing Solutions**

Depending on her hearing problem, various devices or treatments can help. Some possible solutions include:

+ **Hearing Aids:** Recent advances in design and technology have dramatically improved hearing aids over the past few years. She should work with an audiologist to find the right kind. Also, ask about having a trial period so she can try out several different aids. Costs typically range between \$800 and \$3,000 per ear. Medicare doesn't cover hearing aids, nor do most health insurers. For more information on the different kinds of hearing aids, models and new technology, visit [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org) and order the "Consumer's Guide to Hearing Aids" for \$4.25.

+ **Assistive Devices:** These are products that can help with less than perfect hearing, such as telephone amplifying devices, TV and radio listening systems, assistive listening devices or products that alert the person, such as door bells that signal with flashing light, smoke detectors, etc. A good place to locate these types of products is at [www.abledata.com](http://www.abledata.com), or call 800-227-0216.

+ **Cochlear implants:** If hearing loss is severe, cochlear implant surgery may provide a possible solution. Ask her doctor about this option.

**Discount Hearing Aids** For the millions of Americans who need hearing aids but can't afford them, a great program that can help called "Audient", a relatively new, non-profit service, helps people purchase new hearing aids at greatly discounted prices. To be eligible, your income must be no higher than two and a half times the national poverty level- \$24,500 for an individual, plus \$8,500 for each additional family member. No asset test is required and financing plans are also available. If eligible, you'll receive an examination by a hearing health professional within their nationwide network, and then be fitted with new digital, behind-the ear hearing aids. Routine follow-up visits are also provided. Discounts range between 30 and 75 percent. To learn more, visit [www.audientalliance.org](http://www.audientalliance.org) or call 877-283- 4368.

**Savvy Tips:** Many states have a telecommunications equipment distribution program that provides free telephone equipment to assist people with hearing problems. Check with your local telephone company or visit [www.tedpa.org](http://www.tedpa.org) to find what's available in your state. A great resource for hearing loss information is the Better Hearing Institute, which also offers a free booklet titled "Your Guide to Better Hearing." To get a copy, visit [www.betterhearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org) or call 800-327-9355.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit [www.savvysenior.org](http://www.savvysenior.org). Jim Miller is a contributor to the "NBC Today Show" and the author of The Savvy Senior books.