



Understanding Impairments

If you or someone you know has an impairment, discover more about the impact it can have on day-to-day life, and how KCOM can help.

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1. Hearing Impairments

There are 11 million people with hearing loss across the UK, that's around one in six of us. By 2035, we estimate there'll be around 15.6 million people with hearing loss across the UK - that's one in five.

Main causes of hearing impairment

Age: Most of us will experience some degree of hearing loss as we get older. There is no cure for age-related hearing loss, but modern hearing aids can help you to communicate more easily and lead a full life including access to communications.

Noise exposure: Noise-induced hearing loss is caused by prolonged exposure to excessive levels of noise – for example, in noisy workplaces, or while listening to loud music. It's the second-most common form of the condition after age. You might not notice the effects of noise-induced hearing loss until years after you were first exposed to loud noise. Long exposure to sounds over 80dB can damage your ears. In practical terms, this means that if you can't talk to people about two metres away without shouting because of background noise, the noise levels could be hazardous.

Disease: ear infections, torn ear drums, measles and meningitis can often cause hearing problems

Genetics: one in 1,600 of us are born moderately to profoundly deaf because they inherit a mutated gene.

Recognising hearing impairment

- Other people seem to mumble.
- People often have to repeat things for you.
- You have difficulty understanding what is being said in noisy places.
- It is hard to keep up with group conversation and you get tired because you have to concentrate so much.
- Other people think your television or music is too loud.

If you're wondering what it's like to have a hearing impairment, try the [Inclusive Design Toolkit](#).

Evidence suggests that people wait on average 10 years before seeking help for their hearing loss. Hearing aids may be beneficial as they could improve your hearing in a range of everyday situations and make conversations easier. However, hearing aids can't restore your hearing to normal, so it's important to prevent your hearing from being damaged by noise in the first place.

People with hearing impairment can visit their GP and get refer to a hearing specialist in order to be registered as Deaf.

The [Action on Hearing Loss](#) has useful information on their website.



[GARI](#) - the Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative – also has information on their website which may help you find the best device for your own needs, whether sight, hearing or dexterity.

Services we can provide to support you

We offer a range of products to assist our customers with individual needs to communicate easily and effectively. People with hearing impairment may be exempt from rental and installation charges for a small extension bell. Further information is available in our [Price manual](#).

- Next Generation Text Relay Service

For people who need to make or receive calls in which some or all of the call is made or received in text format, we offer a Next Generation Text Relay Service that enables customers with hearing and/or speech impairments to communicate with others through telephone or textphone equipment or other devices such as PCs and tablets.

A 'relay assistant' acts in the middle to text the speech from the two people on the call. You can even link a 'TextNumber' to your existing phone number to make and receive calls without dialling a prefix.

- Type & Read is best if you can't hear and don't use your voice
- Speak & Read should be used if you can't hear but do use your voice
- Type & Hear will be most useful if you can hear but don't use your voice
- Speak & Hear works best if you can hear and want to speak to someone who uses Next Generation Text Relay Service

For full details of the service and how to access it, go to ngts.org.uk or contact the Next Generation Text Relay Service Helpdesk on **0800 7311 888** or if using a textphone or the NGT Lite app on **0800 500 888**.

Calls made using the Next Generation Text Relay Service will never be charged more than what you would have been for the same call made without using it. Those calls can also take longer than standard voice calls due to their nature and typing speed and we therefore apply a rebate to the text element of the calls. Further information is available in our [Price Manual](#).

- SMS Emergency

People with hearing and / or speech impairment have the option of contacting the emergency services by text from their mobile. They need to register their mobile phone first with the emergency SMS service by texting the word 'register' to 999. Further information is available [here](#).

- Free Priority Fault Repair Service

Sometimes, a telephone or a broadband service become a vital lifeline for customers. We offer a free priority fault repair service for customers who rely on their services for **health and mobility reasons** and may be at risk in the unlikely event of a fault occurring on their line.



The service is only available if your household includes someone unable to leave the house unaided due to chronic long-term illness or disability.

We'll prioritise your repair over standard care levels but there may be circumstances beyond our control that mean we can't. For example, extreme weather conditions like floods or storms can delay or prevent our engineers carrying out repairs to overhead cables or working down manholes.

To find out if you're eligible for a Free Priority Fault Repair, and to register for the service please contact us on **01482 602555**. Alternatively, you can use one of our other contact methods on the [contact us](#) page.

- **British Sign Language interpreters**

People with hearing impairment can contact to us through a British Sign Language interpreter. Further information is available [here](#).

- **Third Party Bill Management**

Customers who need help to manage their account can nominate a friend or relative to receive copies of bills and correspondence without them becoming liable for the bill. The Authorised User is able to raise a complaint or make a payment on behalf of the customer. Please call us on **01482 602555** to arrange this on your account. Alternatively, you can use one of our other contact methods on the [contact us](#) page.

- **Social Access Package**

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2. Visual Impairments

There are almost 2 million people living with sight loss in the UK. Of these, around 360,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted.

As we get older, we're more likely to experience some level of sight loss. It affects one in five people aged 75 and over, and one in two people at 90.

Visual impairment is the term used to describe a loss of sight that cannot be corrected using glasses or contact lenses. There are two main categories of visual impairment:

- Partially sighted, which means the level of sight impairment is moderate
- Blind, which means a severe sight impairment where activities that rely on eyesight become impossible.

It's important to get an eye test at least every two years, as several causes of sight loss can be treated and even prevented if they're caught in time. You can arrange an eye test by going to a high street optician, or through your GP.

A consultant ophthalmologist is responsible for registering an individual as blind or partially sighted. The consultant will decide if someone is eligible for their sight loss to be certified and will complete a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI). With this certificate, people could register within their local social service.

There are many degrees of visual impairment ranging from difficulty in reading small characters through to complete blindness, and not everyone with visual impairments can read Braille.

If you're partially sighted, you would be keen to make the most of your remaining sight and using devices that speak information to you such as a voice activated personal assistant could be helpful.

People can visit their GP or optician and get refer to a consultant ophthalmologist in order to be registered as:

- partially sighted, which means the level of sight impairment is moderate
- blind, which means a severe sight impairment where activities that rely on eyesight become impossible.

The [Royal National Institute of Blind People](#) has information on their website.

[GARI](#) - the Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative – also has information on their website which may help you find the best device for your own needs, whether sight, hearing or dexterity.



Services we can provide to support you

- **Directory calls service**

For people who are unable to easily use a printed Directory due to an impairment, we provide a free directory enquiries service. Customers need to call 100 from their landline to register for this service. Alternatively, you can use one of our other contact methods on the [contact us](#) page.

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- **Alternative formats**

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3. Communications difficulties

Nearly 20% of the population experience communication difficulties at some point in their lives. There are many reasons why people might have a speech or language problem. Some people have lived with it since childhood. For some it might be genetic, others might develop an impairment following an injury (such as from being hit or from falling) or because of a medical condition, like a stroke.

Language difficulties are linked with specific damage to the parts of the brain responsible for understanding and using language (ex: aphasia).

Speech difficulties are linked with altered control over the nerves and muscles responsible for speech. (ex: apraxia / dysarthria / stammering).

It doesn't affect intelligence as people still think in the same way but are unable to communicate their thoughts easily.

Charities like the [British Stammering Association](#) and the [Stroke Association](#) have useful information on their website.

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- **Third Party Bill Management**

For some people, their vulnerability means that they can best access services through a third party. Customers who need help to manage their account can nominate a friend or relative to receive copies of bills and correspondence without them becoming liable for the bill. The Authorised User is able to raise a complaint or make a payment on behalf of the customer. Please call us on **01482 602555** to arrange this on your account. Alternatively, you can use one of our other contact methods on the [contact us](#) page.

- **Communicate with us the best way that suits your needs**

People with communications difficulties can contact to us via Live Chat, Email, Post or a British Sign Language interpreter. Further information is available on our [contact us](#) page.

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4. Mobility and Dexterity Impairments

It can be limited by a physical or neurological condition, or because of ageing, injury or a medical condition. Your ability to move about can impact how you communicate. You might need longer to get to places or be unable to sit or stand for a long time.

Having reduced mobility might not be as obvious as some other impairments and it's sometimes hard to admit when you're not able to move about as easily as before.

If you're taking a bit longer to get to the phone, or if you're finding it harder to sit or stand still while talking on the phone, then a few small changes could make a big improvement to how you communicate.

There are several organisations that can help you if you have limited mobility. Your local authority might be able to help with special equipment and assessing your needs. An occupational therapist can also work out what extra support you need.

[GARI](#) - the Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative – also has information on their website which may help you find the best device for your own needs, whether sight, hearing or dexterity.

Tips to help you with mobility issues

- An Occupational Therapist can help you to perform functional tasks more effectively or suggest specialist equipment.
- Massage, reflexology and aromatherapy can help with muscle tone, relaxation and pain relief. Always consult a qualified and insured complementary therapist.
- If possible, try to change position frequently during the day so that your muscles have regular changes in tone.

Dexterity

The use of hands and fingers can be affected by injury, illness or a medical condition. For people with limited dexterity basic tasks like writing or holding a book, operating the keypad or simply holding the phone can be difficult.



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5. Cognitive Impairments

Cognitive impairment is when a person has trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions that affect their everyday life.

Dementia is typically diagnosed when acquired cognitive impairment has become severe enough to compromise social and/or occupational functioning.

Mild cognitive impairment is a state intermediate between normal cognition and dementia, with essentially preserved functional abilities. People have minor problems with their mental abilities such as memory or thinking.

The Alzheimer's disease is most common cause of Dementia with around 500,000 sufferers in the UK. The disease accounts for 50 to 70% of all dementia, affecting an estimated 1 in 14 people over the age of 65 and 1 in every 6 people over the age of 80.

Between 5 and 20% of people aged over 65 have mild cognitive impairment.

Dementia could impact your everyday life in many ways.

Memory: This could be forgetting about recent conversations or events, and forgetting the names of places and objects.

Attention: Failure to pay attention can lead to the person missing important information

Perception: You may interpret verbal information very concretely and miss the subtle nuances of conversation.

Mitigating a mild cognitive impairment

There is a lot you can do to help reduce your chances of a mild cognitive impairment progressing to dementia.

- If you do smoke, now is a good time to stop. If you drink, check you are well within the recommended limits.
- Having a regular routine can help to minimise memory problems.
- Try to always keep things in the same place as it will make them easier to find.
- Use calendars and diaries, or reminders on electronic devices, to help you remember appointments and important events.
- Get regular physical exercise.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Try to sleep well - avoid stimulants like tea or coffee, or having alcohol, before bed.

The [Alzheimer's Society](#) has useful information on their website.



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6. Mental Illness

According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), common **mental health problems include anxiety, depression, bipolar affective disorder, and schizophrenia.**

One in four of the UK population experiences a mental health problem at some time in their lives. In 2013, there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety disorder and almost 4 million cases of mood disorders, including bipolar disorder, in the UK.

Charities like the [Mental health foundation](#) and [Mind](#) have useful information on their website.

Increasing your mental wellbeing

- **Enjoy yourself:** doing something you're good at as enjoying yourself can help beat stress.
- **Exercise:** has been proven to be effective for various mental health issues – from those more common, such as depression and anxiety, to those less common, such as schizophrenia and dementia.
- **Nutrition:** Evidence has found that good nutrition is important for our mental health. Eating properly can help us to maintain a balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing.
- **The arts:** Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses a creative medium to aid people to explore and articulate their emotions and feelings.

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7. Learning Disabilities

Around 1.5 million people in the UK have a learning disability. It's thought up to 350,000 people have a severe learning disability.

A learning disability happens when a person's brain development is affected, either before they're born, during their birth or in early childhood. It reduces intellectual ability and causes difficulty with everyday activities.

Someone with a learning disability can have difficulty with:

- understanding new or complex information
- learning new skills
- coping independently

Learning disability is often confused with dyslexia. Dyslexia as a "learning difficulty" because, unlike learning disability, it does not affect intellect.

Charities like [MenCap](#) have useful information on their website.

People with learning disabilities can contact a social care advisor at The Wilson Centre to be registered as disabled (HULL).

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