

Alerting devices

In this factsheet we tell you about alerting devices for people with hearing loss, including wireless doorbells with flashing lights, vibrating alarm clocks and watches, multi-alerting systems and smoke alarms.

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## What are alerting devices?

If your doorbell, alarm clock, telephone ringer or some other sound isn't loud enough for you to hear, there are alerting devices that can produce a louder sound or notify you with a flashing light or vibration – or a combination of all three.

In this factsheet we look at some of the most common, and useful, alerting devices.

## What can I use to wake up on time?

There are alarm clocks specifically designed for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. There are two main types: bedside alarm clocks and portable travel alarm clocks. There are also vibrating wristwatches and wireless vibrating pads that you can use with alarm-clock apps (software applications) on smartphones and tablets.

### Bedside alarm clocks

These have a sound alarm, just like a normal alarm clock, but also come with a vibrating pad that you put under your pillow. When the alarm goes off, the pad vibrates for a minute or more to wake you.

The vibrating pad has a cable coming from it that plugs into the alarm clock. You can put the pad inside the pillowcase to stop it slipping out. Some pads have a clip that you can attach to the pillow to keep it in place.

The pad may be powerful enough to wake you when placed under your mattress, which might be more comfortable.

Most bedside alarm clocks have a volume control so that you can adjust the loudness of the alarm. Some may also have a tone control to allow you to change the pitch (tone) of the alarm sound, which may make it easier for you to hear.

Bedside alarm clocks for people who are deaf or have hearing loss are usually powered from mains electricity, rather than battery. They may also have one or more of the features listed below:

- a flashing light (that flashes when the alarm goes off)
- the option to select an alarm type: vibration, flashing light, sound alarm, or a combination of all three
- a snooze button
- two or more alarm settings
- battery backup, to keep the time correct if there is a mains power failure
- an 'alarm-on' light that shows the alarm has been set.

Bedside alarm clocks usually cost between £30 and £60.

### Portable travel alarm clocks

There are two types of travel alarm clock for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. First, there are portable bedside alarm clocks that can be attached to a vibrating pad. They are smaller than other bedside alarm clocks – so they're easier to take away – and battery powered.

The second type is a travel alarm clock with a built-in vibration alert, which goes under a pillow. The controls for setting the time, alarm and snooze are covered, so that they cannot be pressed accidentally when the clock is under a pillow.

Both types of portable travel alarm clocks have a sound alarm – usually a ‘bleeping’ sound – that is not very loud. They usually cost between £30 and £40.

## Wristwatch alarms

There is a range of wristwatches you can set to vibrate at the time of your choosing. Some people find the vibration alone powerful enough to wake them. Prices start at £50.

## Wireless vibrating pads

These alarm devices are designed to work with alarm clock apps on smartphones and tablets. The vibrating pad does not plug into the smartphone or tablet, but is linked (or paired) to the smartphone or tablet using Bluetooth, a wireless technology. The alarm-clock app triggers the pad to vibrate when it’s time to get up.

**Important safety note:** If you use a vibrating pad with your smoke alarm, make sure your alarm clock has a different kind of vibration, so that you can tell the difference when you wake up.

## How can I be sure to hear the doorbell?

A doorbell near the front door or in the hallway may be difficult to hear in other parts of your home, even if you only have mild hearing loss. Getting an extension bell or a wireless door chime may help.

## Extension bells or ringers

If you have a mains-powered doorbell, a qualified electrician may be able to add an extension bell or ringer to it, so you can hear it from elsewhere in your house.

## Wireless door chimes

There are many wireless door chimes available. They work by radio and have two parts:

- a weather-proof, battery-operated ‘door-push’ transmitter that’s fixed outside, near the front door (this has a button that your visitors press)
- a battery- or mains-powered chime receiver that can be used almost anywhere in the home\*, which chimes or plays a melody when you use the doorbell.

**\* Important safety note:** Mains electricity-powered equipment must not be used in bathrooms or outdoors. Always read the manufacturer’s instructions.

Wireless door chimes have a selection of chime sounds and musical melodies to choose from. You may find some chime sounds easier to hear than others, so it's a good idea to try out them. Some wireless door chimes also have a flashing light that flashes when someone presses the button.

The door chime may also have one or more of these additional features:

- extra-loud chime sound
- volume control
- tone control to adjust the pitch (tone) of the chime sound
- a vibrating pad (this vibrates when the door push is pressed).

Battery-operated receivers are more portable and can be easily moved around the home. On some, the receiver itself vibrates and can be attached to a belt.

## Wi-Fi doorbells

These are doorbells that let you know when someone is at the door by sending a notification to your smartphone or tablet. They work by connecting to the internet through your home Wi-Fi and they are set up and controlled from an app on your smartphone or tablet.

Wi-Fi doorbells often have more features than traditional wired or wireless doorbells and door chimes. They may have a camera built into the door push so that you can see who is at the door on your smartphone or tablet.

Most have an intercom feature so that you can talk to the person at the door (and they can hear you). Some have a

motion sensor to let you know when someone is at the door, even if they haven't rung the bell.

Some Wi-Fi doorbells have separate Wi-Fi connected chimes (usually sold as an optional extra). They plug into a mains wall socket and you can have as many as you need. They provide a chime sound in addition to the notification on your smartphone or tablet.

When using any device that connects to the internet (whether a Wi-Fi doorbell, smartphone, tablet or computer), make sure you know how to stay safe from hackers and protect your personal details.

## Tips for staying safe online

- Have a unique password for each online account and make it as strong as possible, with a mix of lower- and upper-case letters, numbers and special characters such as # \_ \*.
- Make sure your Wi-Fi is secure – only give your Wi-Fi password to those you trust (the Wi-Fi signal in your home travels very short distances – but your neighbours next door or across the road may still pick it up).
- Keep your software (for example, your apps) updated. This way, you'll have the latest security protection on your device. In many cases, apps associated with devices will notify you if a software upgrade is needed, or do it automatically.



For more on how to keep safe online, see our factsheet *Communicating online*.

## How can I get a fire-risk assessment?

It is very important to have smoke alarms fitted in your home. You can get a free home fire safety check through your local fire and rescue service. The check will identify any fire risks within your home and how to reduce those risks. All areas of your home will be checked.

It's very important during the check to make sure that fire and rescue workers are aware of your hearing loss and whether or not you use hearing aids – this is so they can recommend the most suitable smoke alarm to meet your needs. Remember that when you remove your hearing aids at night, you will be less likely to hear your smoke alarm.

Various smoke alarm systems are available for people with hearing loss, including vibrating pads that go under the pillow, low-frequency sounders and flashing lights.

To book a home fire safety check, you need to contact your local fire and rescue service. A directory of contact numbers for all local fire and rescue services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is listed online at [cfoa.org.uk/frs](https://cfoa.org.uk/frs)

**Important note:** do not dial 999 or 112 to enquire or book a fire safety check.

All fire and rescue personnel carry identification; always ask to see it when they visit your home.

 See our factsheet *Smoke alarms* for further information.

## What baby monitors are available for people with hearing loss?

Standard baby monitors may be useful if you have mild hearing loss, but they are not usually loud enough for parents who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Some baby monitors have a visual display that flashes when the baby starts to cry. These are suitable for monitoring your baby while you are awake but are unlikely to wake you from sleep.

Baby monitors for people who are deaf or have hearing loss have two parts: a monitor unit placed in the same room as the baby, which picks up the sound your baby makes; and a parents' unit. The parents' unit can be used with a vibrating pad to wake you at night. It may also have a flashing light to attract your attention when you are awake.

The monitor unit may have a sensitivity control that you can adjust so that it does not pick up background noise or every little sound your baby makes. You will need to adjust it carefully so that it responds to your baby when it matters. They range in price from £50 to £150.

Some baby monitors let you see your baby on a small display screen and include a baby monitor with a built-in television camera and sound monitoring.

The built-in camera on most monitors is sensitive enough to 'see in the dark', so you can see your baby on the display screen even when the room your baby is sleeping in is dimly lit or dark.

## What is a multi-alerting system?

Rather than having lots of different devices to alert you to different sounds in your home, you may find it easier and more convenient to have all your alerting needs combined into a 'multi-alerting' system. This can alert you to the doorbell, telephone, textphone, smoke alarm and baby monitor through one or more receivers.

Multi-alerting systems have wireless transmitters that respond to certain sounds or events. When triggered – for example, when someone rings the doorbell – they send a wireless signal to a vibratory pager or portable flashing light receiver. This then alerts you with vibrations or flashing lights.

On most multi-alerting systems, you can choose the type and number of receivers and transmitters, depending on your needs.

Different transmitters are designed for particular tasks. A typical system will have a transmitter for the doorbell, telephone, smoke alarm and baby monitor. The transmitter may have a built-in microphone to pick up the sound or be directly connected.

For example, a telephone transmitter may plug into a telephone socket, while a doorbell transmitter may pick up the sound of your existing doorbell or be wired to it. It may have a weather-proof, door-push transmitter that can be placed on a front door frame or porch.

## Vibrating pager

You can clip this wearable device to your clothes or put it in your pocket. It vibrates when your doorbell rings, for example.

Some devices use different vibration patterns to help you know which sound you are being alerted to. Others also use text, numbers or coloured lights with symbols that light up to show you which sound or event you are being alerted to.

The system may have a 'base charger unit' that the pager slots into when it's not in use and charges the battery in the pager. The pager may still receive signals when it's docked in the base unit.

The base unit may have a flashing light and a socket for a vibrating pad. These will be activated when the pager/base unit receives a signal from one of the transmitters.

The base unit is mains powered and may have battery backup, so you can continue to be alerted if the mains supply fails.

## Portable receiver

Some systems have 'table-top' portable receivers that you can move from room to room. If, for example, your doorbell rings, the portable receiver lets you know by flashing a light or a loud sound or both.

Some can be used with a vibrating pad that plugs into the receiver. A portable receiver may also have different coloured lights that light up to show you which sound it is alerting you to.



## Range

Most wireless systems have a range of at least 25m, which is fine for most homes. However, a building's construction can reduce the range. Check that the receiver works properly throughout your home before permanently fitting transmitters.

Occasionally, a transmitter signal may be weak from a certain area of your home, meaning the receiver won't respond when the transmitter is activated.

## Neighbours with similar equipment

If your neighbour has a similar system using the same radio frequency, it may sometimes trigger your pager or portable receiver, or stop it working. Your system may also interfere with theirs. You can usually prevent this by changing the radio channel or code by following the manufacturer's instructions.

## Cost of multi-alerting systems

You will need to decide how many sounds you want to be alerted to before you choose your system. A basic system that can alert you, for example, to a doorbell and telephone will cost less than a system that alerts you to lots of sounds. However, most systems let you add extra optional transmitters and features, increasing the number of sounds you can be alerted to.

## What should I look for when buying equipment?

Try out equipment before you buy. Some equipment may have small, fiddly buttons; others may be an awkward shape or too heavy. Check that:

- buttons are easy for you to press
- you can use the other controls easily
- you can hold the equipment comfortably
- visual indicators and visual alerts are easy to see.

If you are choosing a multi-alerting system, look out for:

- transmitters and receivers that are easy to install with easy-to-use controls
- easy-to-understand instructions
- portable pagers you can hold and carry or wear comfortably
- flashing lights that are bright enough for you to see
- pagers with a belt clip that lets you quickly unclip your pager when it goes off
- a pager with different vibrating rhythms.

## Can I get help with paying for equipment?

Contact our Information Line ([see last page](#)) for more information about the following:

- Social services may help to pay for or provide equipment. For more information, contact your local social services department or see our factsheet *How can social services help?*
- The government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work or at home. See our leaflet *Understanding benefits and grants*.
- The Equality Act 2010 may require service providers, such as hospitals and GP surgeries, to provide equipment. See our factsheet *Your rights when using services*.

- *Text relay services*
- *Understanding wireless technology for hearing aids*
- *Using mobiles and smartphones when you have hearing loss.*

You can order these from our Information Line ([see last page](#) for contact details) or download them from our website at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/how-we-help/information-and-resources/publications/products-and-technology](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/how-we-help/information-and-resources/publications/products-and-technology)

## Join our online forum

There are an increasing number of products available to help with hearing loss. What products couldn't you live without?

Join the debate in our **Products and Equipment** online forum: [community.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/products-and-equipment/f/forum](http://community.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/products-and-equipment/f/forum)

## Where can I get further information about products and technology?

The other factsheets in our **Products and Technology** range are:

- *Assistive listening devices*
- *Communicating online*
- *Enjoying TV*
- *Home telephones*
- *Smoke alarms*



## Information you can trust

We are certified by The Information Standard as a producer of high-quality, evidence-based information. Our **Product Technologist, Kevin Taylor**, reviewed and updated this factsheet, published October 2017.

## Did you find this factsheet helpful?

We'd love to know what you think of this factsheet – please email us at [reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk)

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# Products to help with hearing loss

The Action on Hearing Loss online shop features the latest products and technology to help with hearing loss and tinnitus, including home telephones, and our experienced Customer Services team is here to support you to choose the product that's right for you. All proceeds from product sales go back into supporting Action on Hearing Loss.

Shop online at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop](https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop)

To order your free catalogue, or to find out which products could help you, look online or contact our Customer Services team:

Telephone: **03330 144 525**

Textphone: **03330 144 530**

Email: [solutions@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:solutions@hearingloss.org.uk)



## Further information from Action on Hearing Loss

Our expert information covers everything you need to know about:

- hearing loss and deafness
- tinnitus
- ear problems and treatments
- hearing aids and cochlear implants
- useful products and technology
- communication tactics and support
- benefits and grants
- your rights.

Visit our website [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk) or call our Information Line ([see last page](#)) for information, support and publications. You can also find out about services in your area, our hearing research, and how you can get involved.



## Please help us support others

We provide our leaflets, factsheets and Information Line service free of charge to anyone affected by deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss in the UK. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to help us do this. We would be very grateful if you would consider making a donation – of as little or as much as you can afford.

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Our purpose is to help people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. We enable them to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to **[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)**

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### **Action on Hearing Loss Information Line**

Telephone: **0808 808 0123**

Textphone: **0808 808 9000**

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Email: **[information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)**

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