

# Disclosure strategies may improve communication for those with hearing loss

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A survey of 337 Mass. Eye and Ear patients revealed 3 distinct strategies for disclosing hearing loss. Credit: John Earle

Massachusetts Eye and Ear researchers surveyed 337 patients with hearing loss to better understand the language they use with

communication partners to disclose their disability. Their findings, published online in the journal *Ear and Hearing* on October 28, 2015, may be used to develop resources for health care professionals to provide their patients with strategies to disclose hearing loss successfully and effectively in interactions with others.

"Health care providers are in a key position to help [patients](#) learn how to disclose their hearing loss," said senior author Konstantina M. Stankovic, M.D., Ph.D., FACS, an otologic surgeon and researcher at Mass. Eye and Ear and an associate professor of otolaryngology at Harvard Medical School. "We can educate them on the disclosure strategies we report on in our study, which may help them gain the confidence they need to disclose their hearing loss and improve communication with others."

The researchers created a survey designed to gather actual phrases that patients have used to let others know that they have a hearing disability. First author Jessica S. West, M.P.H., a sociologist at Duke University, analyzed the respondents' answers and codified the responses into three major categories, formalizing these strategies for verbally addressing hearing loss for the first time:

- basic disclosure, to describe those who disclose that they have hearing loss and perhaps also share details about their condition

Example: I'm partially deaf due to an infection I had years ago.

- nondisclosure, to describe those who do not disclose their hearing loss and/or use phrases that normal hearing people may use;

Example: I can't hear you. Please speak up.

- multipurpose disclosure, to describe those who disclose hearing loss and also suggest an accommodation strategy;

Example: I don't hear as well out of my right ear. Please walk on my left side.

The findings have motivated the researchers to begin developing a resource guide to help [health care providers](#) better prepare their patients for social situations to avoid the isolation that is all too common for people with hearing loss and other communication disabilities.

"We think it can be empowering for patients to know that these strategies, and especially the multipurpose disclosure strategy, are available to them," Dr. Stankovic said. "Hearing loss is an invisible disability; however, asking people to slow down or face someone with [hearing loss](#) while speaking may improve communication."

**More information:** [journals.lww.com/ear-hearing/A...  
ow\\_People.99260.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/ear-hearing/A...ow_People.99260.aspx)

Provided by Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary

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