

HEARING AIDS: WHAT TO EXPECT

As a new hearing aid user or someone who is considering trying hearing aids, it is important that you understand some basic information about how hearing aids work and what can be achieved with amplification. You also need to recognize that there are limitations to hearing aids.

Developing realistic expectations is critical to success with hearing aids.

FACTS ABOUT HEARING AIDS

- **Hearing aids cannot restore your hearing or your communication to "normal" as you remember it.** Current hearing aids are high fidelity instruments. However, you must consider that the hearing aid is being worn on an ear which may have its own built-in distortion. Your ears ultimately set the limits for the quality of amplified sound.
- It takes time and persistence to adjust to hearing aids. You CANNOT expect to be comfortable with amplified sound in all situations overnight. Hearing aids are sold on a 30 day trial basis for this reason. It may take the length of the trial period before you can reliably assess the benefits you receive. **Be patient with your hearing aids and with yourself.**
- **Daily, preferably full-time use** increases your chance for successful adjustment to hearing aids.
- A well-fit hearing aid should feel **comfortable** in your ear. Hearing aids are made from impressions (like dentures), so they may need adjustment to achieve a good fit.
- **Your own voice may sound loud and unnatural to you at first.** You will adjust to this over time. Hearing impaired people sometimes talk loudly in order to hear themselves and do not realize they are doing so. Your hearing aids will help you to monitor the volume of your voice.
- A hearing aid microphone is most effective at picking up sound originating from within several feet from the hearing aid. **The farther you are from the sound source, the less effectively the hearing aid will work.**
- **A hearing aid is most effective when worn in quiet surroundings.** New hearing aid circuits are now available which reduce interference from background noise. However, despite some advertising claims, **NO hearing aid eliminates all background noise.**
- There are significant acoustic advantages to using hearing aids on **BOTH EARS** (binaurally) for most hearing impaired people.
- Many people find it difficult to use their hearing aids on the **telephone**. An option available on some hearing aids is a "**telecoil**", which amplifies the signal coming through the telephone receiver and enables telephone use without acoustic **feedback** (a whistle that normally occurs whenever an object comes close to the hearing aid). In addition to a hearing aid, a telephone-amplifying device may be helpful in alleviating any telephone communication problems you have.

- A telecoil can also be used with an **induction loop system**. It transmits magnetic energy directly to hearing aids that are fitted with telecoils. A few applications that a loop system would be helpful in are: theatres, places of worship, public transit, classrooms, home TV and more.
- When it is properly adjusted, a hearing aid **should never make sound so loud that it hurts your ear**.
- Even when wearing your hearing aids, you will achieve the best communication by positioning yourself near the speaker in such a way that you can see his/her facial expressions and gestures. **Visual information** increases speech understanding by about 40%.
- **Whispered speech, foreign accents and indistinct speech** will probably continue to be difficult for you to understand, even when you are using your hearing aids.
- **Environmental sounds** like running water, footsteps, paper crinkling, etc., will be amplified by your hearing aids. These are sounds that you may not have heard since you acquired your hearing loss. It is likely that you heard these sounds when your hearing was normal, but that you tuned them out. In time, you can learn to ignore these sounds again. However, they may be annoying to you at first.
- There are some listening settings in which hearing aids are of limited or no help to some people. These include restaurants, large group meetings or parties, and when riding in a car. These situations usually involve a high level of **background noise**, which interferes with speech understanding. When possible, communicate away from the noise. In restaurants, request a booth or table so that you can be seated with you facing the wall or corner.
- **Room acoustics** also play a significant role in communication. High ceilings, hard walls and floors make hearing and understanding much more difficult. In your own home, manipulate the environment as much as possible (drapes, carpeting, low ceilings) to improve the acoustics.
- Hearing aids run on a **battery**, which must be replaced every five to ten days. Exact battery life varies, depending on many factors. Your audiologist should be able to give you information about expected battery life of your hearing aid.
- Considering their size, intricacy and typical conditions of use, **hearing aids are fairly durable. However, they are not indestructible**. They can be damaged by **moisture**, by **impact** (dropping or crushing), by **earwax** building up in the receiver, etc. Like any electronic device, parts eventually wear out and need to be replaced.

This list of facts about hearing aids is provided as a general guide to help you understand what to expect from amplification. After your hearing has been evaluated, your audiologist will consider the test findings and other information you provide about your communication problems and goals. Your audiologist can then offer you more information that is designed specifically for you.

Northwestern Medical Group

Audiology Service

Department of Otolaryngology

675 N. St. Clair, Suite 15-200

Chicago, IL 60611

312-695-8107

