



Now Hear This:

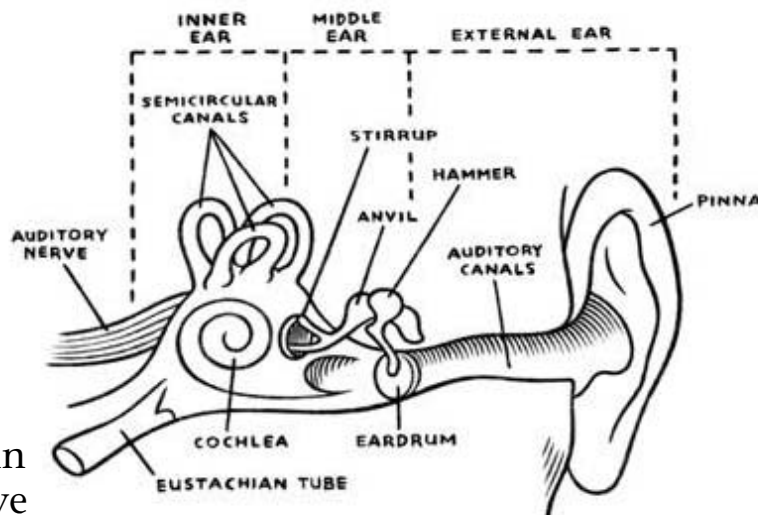
Tips for Better Hearing at Home and in the Community

What is a hearing aid?

A hearing aid is a device that makes sounds louder so that a person who has hearing loss can communicate better.

If a person has been struggling with a hearing loss for a long time, he or she may have turned down invitations to do things with others because of difficulty following conversations. The main goal of a hearing aid is to improve the quality of a person's life by enabling the person to feel connected to others and to understand what is said in conversations once again.

Each person's hearing loss is different, and there is not one hearing aid that works best for everyone. The audiologist will adjust the hearing aid so it amplifies the pitches each person needs to hear. Hearing aids come with a trial period of about 30-45 days. During this time the



audiologist will make any adjustments that are necessary based on how the person is hearing sounds.

All hearing aids are battery operated. Batteries usually last about 100 hours and can easily be replaced by the hearing aid user. It is important to open the battery chamber when not wearing the aid, otherwise the battery will be drained.

How are hearing aids described?

Hearing aids are discussed by breaking them into 2 main categories.

1. Types (what they sound like or the technology inside)
2. Styles (what they look like)

Read pages 2, 3 and 4 for information about the different types and styles of hearing aids.

What are the different types of hearing aids?

1. Analog Hearing Aids

An analog hearing aid is a basic hearing aid. The audiologist will be limited in the number of adjustments he or she can make in customizing the fit. Analog hearing aids are most appropriate for people who do most of their listening in quiet environments. Many manufacturers of hearing aids have stopped producing analog aids in favor of digital hearing aids. Analog hearing aids are typically less expensive than digital hearing aids. Analog hearing aids are available in all styles.

Behind-the-ear hearing aid



2. Digital Hearing Aids

These hearing aids have a tiny computer chip in them, enabling the audiologist to program the aid for a specific hearing loss. Digital hearing aids break a sound wave into small, discreet bits of informa-

tion. Those bits are then amplified before being converted back into sound. Breaking the sound into small bits of information allows a digital hearing aid to be customized for an individual's hearing loss. Digital hearing aids can also make sounds more comfortable by amplifying soft sounds but not loud sounds. Digital hearing aids can be equipped with many different features or enhancements, which will affect the cost. Some digital hearing aids are equipped with more than one microphone, one that picks up sound in front and one that picks up sound from behind the person. The hearing aid can then be programmed to identify sound behind the person as 'noise' and block it out, placing the focus on the sound in front of the person.

An advantage of digital hearing aids is that they are self-adjusting, so most do not have volume wheels. This is ideal for a person with mobility or vision problems. Digital hearing aids range in price. Enhancements included in the aid increase the cost to nearly three times that of an analog hearing aid. Digital hearing aids are available in all styles.

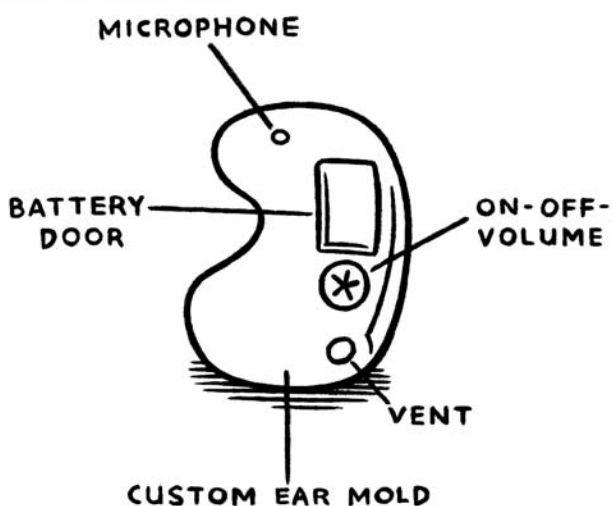
What are the different styles of hearing aids?

No matter what style of hearing aid the person chooses, the audiologist will make an impression of the person's ear in order to create a mold or shell that fits properly. This is a painless procedure which involves putting a soft compound in the ear for a few minutes. After it is removed, it is sent to the hearing aid manufacturer along with the audiogram (graph of the hearing test results). This process results in a hearing aid or a plastic mold the exact shape of the person's ear.

1. In-the-ear hearing aid

This is the largest of the hearing aids that go directly in the ear. It can accommodate a larger battery than the other products and may have a larger volume wheel. This model is most appropriate for people with dexterity or vision problems. In-the-ear hearing aids are appropriate for people with mild to severe hearing loss.

IN THE EAR:



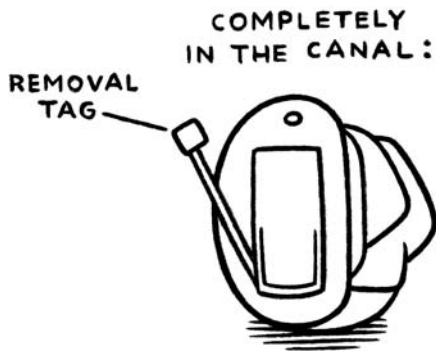
IN THE CANAL:



2. In-the-canal hearing aid

This product is smaller than the in-the-ear version and fills about half of the concha area. In-the-canal hearing aids typically have a smaller battery and volume wheel than the in-the-ear hearing aids. This model will be more difficult for a person with vision/dexterity problems. Canal aids are appropriate for people with mild to moderate hearing loss.

What are the different types of hearing aids?



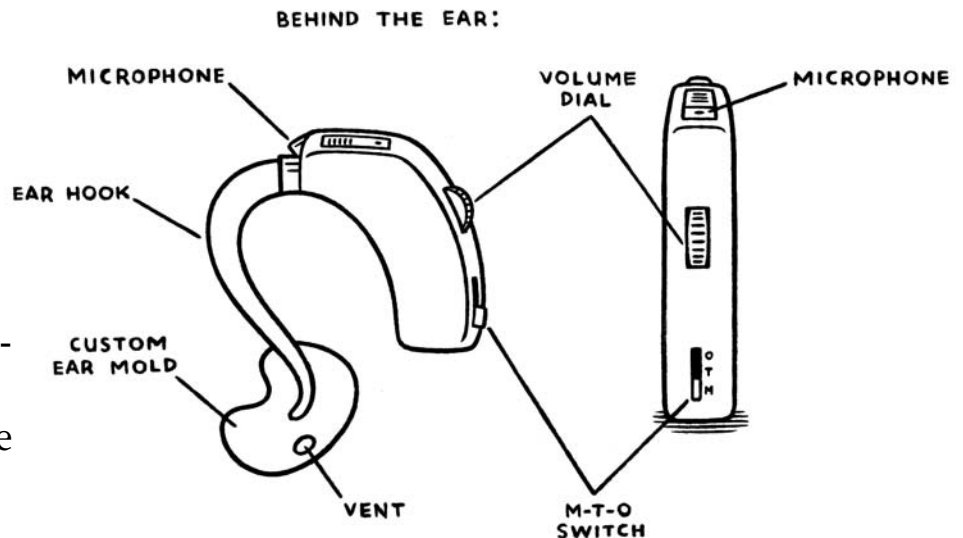
3. Completely-in-the-canal hearing aid

This is the smallest of the products and is often advertised as “invisible”. This hearing aid is appropriate for people with mild to moderate hearing loss. Because it is so tiny the batteries are very small and it is definitely not appropriate for people with vision or dexterity problems. Because of its size, it does not offer all of the technological complexities of the larger aids. In addition, because of the small size a volume control is usually not included. Completely-in-the canal hearing aids are usually digital aids, so the volume control is automatic.

4. Behind-the-ear hearing aid

Behind-the-ear hearing aids consist of two pieces. A plastic earmold that is relatively inexpensive and is custom made to fit into the ear and the hearing aid mechanism.

The ear mold is connected via a piece of tubing to the hearing aid, which hangs behind the ear. Most behind-the-ear hearing aids have a volume control, a battery compartment and an MTO (on, telecoil, off) switch. A telecoil is a magnetic coil built into the hearing aid which picks up the energy of the telephone and amplifies it. The telecoil can be used with assistive listening devices such as the neck or induction loop. A behind-the-ear hearing aid is appropriate for a person with mild to profound hearing loss. An advantage to the behind-the-ear hearing aid is that it is less prone to damage by earwax since the mold that goes into the ear is just plastic and the actual hearing aid hangs behind the ear. In addition, a behind-the-ear hearing aid is the only style appropriate for people with a profound hearing loss and for children.



Getting used to hearing aids

Most people gradually lose their hearing over the course of time. On average, people experience hearing difficulties for 5-7 years before seeking help. So it may have been some time since a person has heard certain sounds, such as birds chirping, road noises, or the hum of a fan. Once someone purchases a hearing aid, an adjustment period is needed to become comfortable hearing all of these wonderful sounds again. Most people wear new hearing aids for a couple of hours each day, and then gradually increase the amount of time they are worn, rather than wearing them all day immediately.

One's own voice will sound different

Along with other peoples' voices and environmental sounds, hearing aids amplify one's own voice. Therefore, one's own voice may sound different. This difference is also part of the adjustment period.

Hearing aids are not "new ears"

Most people with hearing loss have a permanent type of loss that affects their nerve endings. Hearing aids cannot correct this permanent damage — they cannot restore a person's hearing to normal in the

same way that eyeglasses restore sight. Instead, hearing aids simply provide assistance to help one hear sounds better. They are one component of the listening process. They should be used in combination with effective listening strategies and other assistive listening devices as needed.

The clarity vs. loudness issue

Hearing aids are designed to amplify sounds, thereby making sounds easier to hear. For most people, this increase in volume also increases the ability to understand speech. However, for some people, the clarity in their ears is compromised. Even if a sound is loud enough, the sound is not clear and therefore not easily understood or perceived. Unfortunately, hearing aids can not make sounds more clear, but they do make sounds louder.

Utilize communication strategies

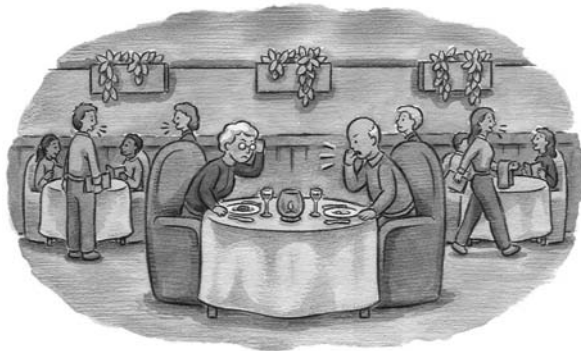
As mentioned earlier, hearing aids do not restore hearing to normal. It is unrealistic to think that one will be able to hear everything that everyone is saying, even with hearing aids. Therefore, using the other communication strategies described in this course is very important.

Help from friends and family

Hearing loss poses difficulties for the hard of hearing person as well as their normally hearing friends and family members. Once a person is getting help from hearing aids, he or she should ask for help from communication partners. Ask people to speak from the same room, get one's attention before speaking, and eliminate distracting noise (i.e. TV, water running in the sink, radio). The more help they give, the less frustration one will experience.

Have realistic expectations

Remember, in a noisy restaurant or at a party, most people, even those with normal hearing, cannot hear perfectly. At the movies, some dialogue is missed by normal hearing people. People shouldn't expect to hear everything perfectly, or they will be disappointed.



Hearing aids should be stored away from children and pets!

How does one care for a hearing aid?

Hearing aids should be kept dry and protected from excessive temperatures. The leading causes of hearing aid repairs are earwax, which gets caught in the hearing aid, and moisture from humidity or perspiration. Many problems can be avoided if you follow simple care and maintenance instructions.

When caring for your aid, it is recommended that you handle it over a soft surface to minimize the risk of damage by dropping it. Wipe your earmold or hearing aid with a dry tissue or cloth after each wearing. Do NOT use alcohol, water, or other solutions to clean the aid. Check the sound opening of the aid daily to make sure it is clear of wax.

Thanks to Bridgid Whitword, M.A., CCC/A of Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center and Bonnie O'Leary of Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons for their contributions to this publication.