

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR HEARING AIDS

For some people, getting hearing aids can be an overwhelming experience. Unlike glasses, it takes time for the brain to adjust to, and make sense of, the sounds in your environment. This guide has been created to help you better understand this process, and to help you get the most from your hearing aids not just now, but also in the long term.

ADJUSTING TO HEARING AIDS

With prolonged hearing loss the brain is deprived of stimulation and ‘forgets’ how to recognize the sounds it no longer hears. A hearing aid can reintroduce these sounds, however it takes time for the brain to relearn how to make sense of this information. This process is called *acclimatization* and it varies from person to person. How quickly you adjust to the hearing aids will depend on the environment (e.g. quiet conversation will be easier to hear than a group conversation at a noisy restaurant), but can take up to six months for some people.

The acclimatization process is like learning to play an instrument. You should start with the basics (listening in quiet) before trying to master your favorite song (listening at your favorite restaurant). To help this process, it is important that you practice. Wear your hearing aids consistently, even in situations where you may not think you need them (e.g. on your own around the house). Even in these situations, your auditory pathways are being stimulated and the brain is reorganizing itself to recognize sounds.

Initially most people find that, with hearing aids, background noise is quite intrusive. You might be hyper-alert to sounds which you haven’t heard correctly in a while (e.g. water in the sink, cutlery on the plate, traffic outside). By listening to those sounds with your hearing aids the brain will begin to identify, and filter out, those sounds which are a part of your everyday environment. This is very similar to how someone who moves to a house near a busy road learns to filter out the road noise.

To help you get used to the new sounds, your audiologist may set the hearing aids at a level that is softer than your recommended prescription. Over time, depending on your unique experience, the hearing aids may be gradually moved closer to their target. For some people this will happen quickly, while for others they will never quite reach their recommended target.

EXPECTATIONS OF HEARING AIDS

Unfortunately, a hearing aid cannot return your hearing to normal as hearing damage is most commonly located in the ear (the microphone to your brain), which causes some distortion. Your brain has to relearn to listen through this damaged system. Instead, it helps to compensate for your hearing loss by amplifying sounds to a level where you can hear them and your brain needs to relearn how to hear in this new way. Hearing aids are not able to only amplify the sounds you want to hear although; technology in more advanced devices can do a better job at separating speech from background noise.

It is important to realize that you may still have difficulties listening in some situations. You may still need to ask for someone to repeat themselves from time to time, and you may still miss parts of your favorite television show. However, with hearing aids you should find that this occurs significantly less often. Remember, challenging listening situations can cause difficulties for people with normal hearing too. Unfortunately your hearing aids won’t give you super hearing, no matter what the manufacturers claim in some of their marketing.

TIPS AND TRICKS WE HAVE LEARNT OVER THE YEARS

SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

You should let your audiologist know of any difficulties that you're having as soon as they arise. During the acclimatization period this can help to determine if your experience is 'normal', or whether the hearing aids need to be tweaked. In the long-term your audiologist will be able to help you with any queries regarding your hearing, or hearing aids.

Handy Tip: Be as descriptive as possible in providing information about the difficulties you're having as this can better help your audiologist to pin-point the problem.

REGULAR TUNE-UPS

It is a good idea to schedule regular visits with your audiologist. We recommend having the hearing aids checked every six months (much like you would with a new car), to ensure that they are working well. We also recommend having your hearing checked annually. If there is a change in your hearing, your audiologist can adjust the devices accordingly.

Handy Tip: Return to your audiologist sooner if you notice any sudden changes in performance, or your underlying hearing.

BATTERIES – QUALITY OVER QUANTITY.

When purchasing batteries, look for high-quality brands made specifically for hearing aids. Lower quality batteries, or those near their expiry date, tend to under-perform and not last as long. Your hearing aid specialist should be able to provide batteries that are specifically best for your hearing aids, which are at least a year from Expiration.

Handy Tip: To get up to 20% more life out of your batteries wait five minutes, after you first activate them, before you put them in your hearing aids.

CLEANLINESS MAKES IT EASIER TO HEAR THE DETAILS

A hearing aids is worn in quite harsh environment as the ear is moist, waxy a, oily and is constantly exposed to dust. Regular cleaning and maintenance will help to keep your hearing aids in working order. Brush over the device on a daily basis (particularly the microphone covers and the part that goes into your ear) to remove any dirt, dust and wax. Inspect the wax filter, usually located on the part that goes deepest into your ear, on a regular (fortnightly or monthly) basis, and change the filter as required.

Handy Tip: If the hearing aids are around a lot of water, sweat, or you live in a humid climate, talk to your audiologist about a dry-kit for your hearing aid. This will help to minimize the risk of moisture damage.

GETTING THE BEST PERFORMANCE OUT OF YOUR HEARING AIDS

As stated above, hearing aids are just that; an aid to your hearing. People with hearing aids may still have some difficulties hearing conversation, but the following strategies can help to minimize communication breakdowns and assist you in getting the most out of your hearing aids.

BEFORE A BREAKDOWN OCCURS

- ☞ Choose the right listening environment. Rooms with hard surfaces are more difficult to hear in as sound tends to echo. Pick restaurants, or decorate rooms at home, with soft surfaces, such as rugs, wall drapes and curtains to help absorb noise.
- ☞ When going to restaurants, pick a time or place that is less busy to minimize the background noise.
- ☞ In large groups, position yourself near those you most want to hear. Remember, the more people there are, and the greater distance between you, the harder it will be to hear.
- ☞ Switch your hearing aids into your specialized listening program (if you have one) for that situation. Some hearing aids do so automatically. These modes are designed to pick up speech from the front better than from the sides or back. So make sure you face those speaking to you.
- ☞ Make others aware of your hearing difficulties and what they can do to help facilitate conversation. Ask them to get your attention prior to starting a conversation, and to speak clearly while facing you.
- ☞ Have a communication partner close by who can fill in and repeat things for you in case you get stuck.

GENERAL CONVERSATION TIPS

- ☞ Face the person you are speaking with. Make sure that you can see their face clearly as this will help you to pick up extra information from lip-movement, and facial expression. Research shows that you can do up to 40% better by just being able to see their faces clearly.
- ☞ Make sure there is sufficient lighting for you to clearly see the face of the person you are speaking to.
- ☞ Move closer to the person you want to hear, as the microphones work best at around 1-2m distance, when in noise. The noisier, the closer you need to be to hear clearly.
- ☞ Move away from sources of noise (e.g. dishwashers, the TV, nearby conversations) or turn off loud sources of noise such as overbearing music.
- ☞ Position your back to the loudest source of background noise, as most hearing aids will focus towards the front in these environments.
- ☞ Remember that sounds from you back can bounce off a wall in front of you, negating the effect of any noise reduction modes on the hearing aid. So sit at least 3 meters away from the closest wall in front of you.
- ☞ Sometimes simply turning your hearing aids softer rather than louder (if this functionality is available on your hearing aid) can help. There is a fine line between understanding what you are hearing and being overwhelmed by what you are hearing.

IF A CONVERSATION BREAKDOWN OCCURS

- ☞ Be specific when letting people know that you haven't heard what is said (e.g. say "I'm sorry, what time were we meeting at the park?" rather than "what?" or "huh?").
- ☞ Phrase questions in a way that makes it easier to anticipate the answer (e.g. "Did you say we were meeting at seven or eleven?")

- 👂 Repeat the message to ensure you heard it correctly (e.g. "Okay, I'll see you at the park at seven")
- 👂 Ask people to spell it out (e.g. "S for Steve, E for Elephant, V for Volcano, E or Elephant, and N for Nigel").
- 👂 Ask people to rephrase the information, rather than just repeat it.
- 👂 Use contextual cues to make sense of the information (what are you talking about?).

ON THE TELEPHONE

- 👂 Use your better hearing ear (if you have one).
- 👂 Move yourself away from background noise, or turn down the television.
- 👂 When taking messages, ask people to spell the important parts (e.g. B for Bob).
- 👂 If you have a telecoil/telephone program in your hearing aid, make sure this is activated (in many hearing aids this can be activated automatically).
- 👂 Position the receiver so that it is near your microphone, rather than over your ear canal.
- 👂 Use the speakerphone.
- 👂 Use a phone designed specifically for your hearing aid if available.

TELEVISION

- 👂 Invest in a sound bar/speaker system. Most modern flat screen speakers are located at the rear of the set. A sound bar, or speaker system, which will bring the sound toward you, making it clearer and easier to understand.
- 👂 Avoid surround sound if needed, as the speech comes from a small speaker in the front and the noise surrounds you from all directions.
- 👂 Use subtitles to help you pick up words which you miss.
- 👂 TV shows and movies with less background noise/music will be much easier to follow and understand.
- 👂 Make sure the television is well lit so you can see actors' lip movements, and the television room has soft surfaces to reduce any echo.
- 👂 Don't sit too far away from the television
- 👂 Ask your hearing care provider if it is possible to create a special television listening mode if you have any difficulties.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES (ALDS)

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) are accessories designed to make listening easier in specific situations. There are a range of devices which can be used to enhance the listening experience in a variety of situations. Ask your provider about their availability if you need more help than the hearing aids alone can provide.

TELEVISION

- 👂 Headphones that receive the audio from the television and can be turned up independently of the volume everyone else has. The problem here is that it tends to cut you off from those in the room wanting to speak to you
- 👂 Bluetooth adaptors that stream the television audio to the hearing aids. These allow you to hear the TV while also being able to speak to those in the room. This is not available on all hearing aid models.

TELEPHONE

- 🔗 Bluetooth adaptors that stream the phone signal to the hearing aids. These are very effective at making phones much easier to use.
- 🔗 Landline Bluetooth adaptors, to make your landline compatible with Bluetooth technology.
- 🔗 Amplified telephones to provide a louder sound signal
- 🔗 Landline phones that communicate directly with some hearing aids.

CAR

- 🔗 Remote Microphones worn by conversation partners. The streams the voice directly to the hearing aids.
- 🔗 Some hearing aids have features that automatically optimize hearing in a car
- 🔗 For others your hearing care provider might be able to add a manual setting to help in the car.

BACKGROUND NOISE

- 🔗 Remote Microphones to pick up speech and transmit it directly to the hearing aids, improving the signal-to-noise ratio dramatically
- 🔗 FM Systems to pick up speech and transmit it directly to the hearing aids, improving the signal-to-noise ratio.

MEETINGS/LECTURES

- 🔗 FM system to pick up the lecturer/speaker and transmit it directly to the hearing aids, reducing the distance between the speaker and the hearing aid user.

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS TO GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR HEARING AID EXPERIENCE

There are many different hearing aids with different capabilities. There are however a few generic tips that could help you get even more out of your investment and help you enjoy years of better hearing.

INSURANCE

- 🔗 Most hearing aids have manufacturers' loss and damage cover during the first 12 months from date of ordering. The excess for this is quite high (as much as \$1000 in some cases) and they only ever cover one event. As such we would recommend that you insure your hearing solution with your home and contents insurance as a portable valuable. The premium should be around 5% of the value with minimal excess. This will save you lots of pain if you ever lose your hearing aid or if it is deemed damaged beyond repair by the manufacturer.
- 🔗 If this has happened to your hearing aid, the first step is to contact your provider and they can get the ball rolling on arranging a replacement.

BRAIN TRAINING

- 🔗 There is more and more research evidence showing improved hearing with hearing aids, particularly in the presence of background noise with the use of adaptive brain training software. Ask your audiologist about what they might have available or would recommend for you to use.

MORE HEARING AID USE = MORE BENEFIT

- 👂 The minimum time a hearing aid needs to be used per day to be considered a successful user is 4 Hours.
- 👂 The more you use the hearing aid per day, the more you will benefit.
- 👂 The most successful users use their hearing aids up to 14 hours or more a day! How are you comparing?

CONTACT YOUR HEARING CARE PROFESSIONAL IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT ANYTHING

- 👂 That is what they are there for. Never assume you are being a pain – if they treat you that way, it might be time to find another provider. In fact without your feedback, they won't know how to help you do better.
- 👂 Hearing aids are about the partnership with your clinician, rather than just a device that does it all.

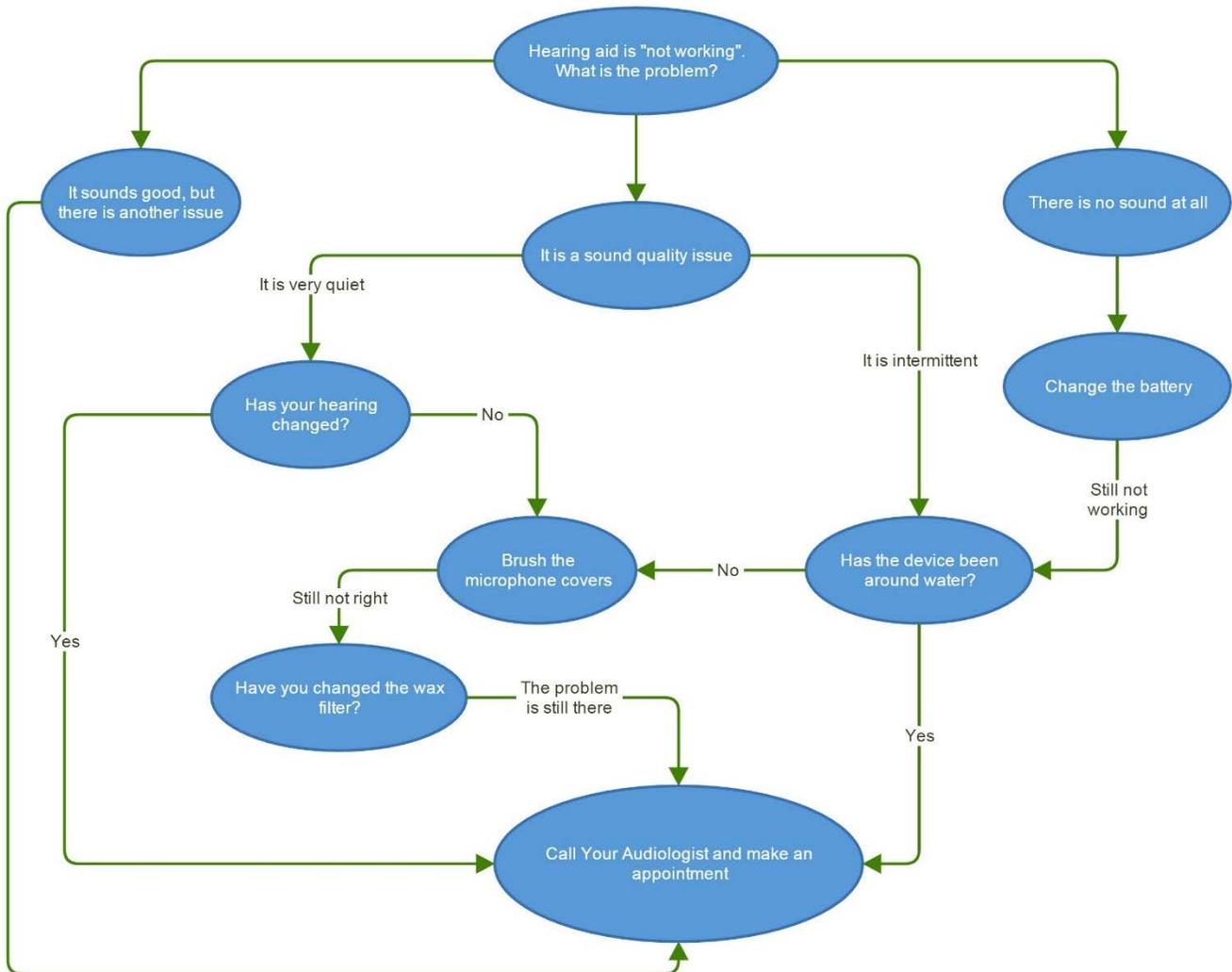
START SAVING FOR YOUR NEXT SET

- 👂 As mentioned previously, hearing aids last around 5 years before they require replacement. Once you experience the benefit that properly fit hearing aids provide, you may never want to go without them.
- 👂 As such, it might be an idea to put away a small amount, equivalent to what you paid for your current hearing aids divided by 60, per month. That way, you will have the funds ready when the time comes.
- 👂 By the time that you need new hearing aids, technology would have rocketed forward and you will be able to purchase a much improved set for around the same price.

TROUBLESHOOTING

With regular cleaning, care, and six-monthly checks by your audiologist, your hearing aids should last you around five years. We also recommend getting your hearing aids serviced under warranty just before the warranty expires. This way you should get some extra life out of your investment.

However, as with all electronic devices, sometimes your hearing aids may stop working. When things go wrong, there are a few things that you can do try and troubleshoot the problem. This can save you from an unnecessary trip to the audiologist. Try working through the below guide to see if there's anything you can do to resolve the trouble. If all else fails, then let your audiologist know. Many issues can be resolved with a simple phone call or email to your provider.



IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

MY HEARING AID GOT WET!

- ☞ Immediately remove and dispose of the battery – it will likely leak and cause more trouble than good.
- ☞ Dry off the hearing aid with a tissue and then use a hair dryer on its cool setting for about 5 minutes to blow away as much moisture as you can.
- ☞ Find a container with an air tight lid and fill it with dry rice or pasta if you have no rice available. Put a tissue on top of the rice or pasta and place the hearing aid with its battery compartment open on top of the tissue. Close the container lid and let the hearing aid rest for at least 24 hours.
- ☞ If they aid is still not working properly after this, contact your provider.