

Getting used to your new hearing aid

For many of us, our first hearing aid produces a mixture of emotions – anticipation, nervousness and maybe frustration. But we're governed by success. If the aid helps us hear better, then everything is worth it.

Patience is the key to success. New hearing aid users might get discouraged that they do not hear immediately what they expect to hear with their new aid and put the hearing aid in the drawer to "try another time". Take it step by step until you and your aid are on the same wavelength. You are in control and there are simple steps to success.

There are 7 steps in your aid management

Step 1: Start by using your hearing aid in quiet, familiar situations. The world is a noisy place and it takes time to adjust to amplified sounds. Once you have adjusted to quiet situations, then you are ready to start gradually using your aid in more difficult listening situations, such as larger groups of people, auditoriums and theatres, restaurants and so on. Although the specific type and degree of hearing loss are important, your willingness to have patience to learn to hear in these situations is just as great a factor. Everyone should try to wear an aid in difficult places to determine the amount of help that can be received. If adjustments are needed, talk to your audiologist.

Step 2: Use it first for short periods of time. The length of time depends on you and may vary from a few minutes to an hour or longer. If you begin to feel fatigue or irritation, either from listening to amplified sounds or from soreness of the ear canal, take the aid out and rest a while – then try again. Soon you will find that you can use the aid for longer periods with greater comfort. If you have no problems adjusting to the earpiece or sound coming in, then of course use your hearing aid for as long as you like, but do not become discouraged.

Step 3: As a new hearing aid user, you will hear some sounds which you have not heard for a long time. These sounds may include the ticking of a clock, the motor of the refrigerator, dogs barking, birds chirping, or the crumbling of paper. Some of these sounds you will be happy to hear again. Others may be annoying, especially if you are trying to hear and understand speech at the same time. Just as a person with normal hearing has learned to block these sounds out of their conscious hearing, so will you, to some extent. But this takes time. If, after a decent period you think you need the hearing aid adjusted to filter these sounds, see your audiologist.

Step 4: Many new "smart hearing aids do not have a volume control – they adjust automatically to background noise. Other aids have a volume control that you can manipulate to regulate the loudness of incoming sounds. Different listening situations impose a variety of demands on a person's hearing, so it is often necessary for you to adjust your aid according to the situation. With practice, you should be able to predetermine the most comfortable volume for a given listening environment, so you are not constantly changing the volume. Adjust the level so you can hear speech most comfortably without straining.

HEARING ASSOCIATION NELSON

354 Trafalgar Square, Nelson 7010 Phone: 03 548 3270

Email: hearingnelson.team@xtra.co.nz Website: www.hearingnelson.co.nz

Step 5: There are many instances in your everyday life when unanticipated loud sounds occur. You should not be unduly alarmed about this since all hearing aids have a limited output level, beyond which sounds cannot be made louder. When these sounds occur, the aid may 'blank' out the sound. This is normal. For people with lowered tolerance levels, the output can be adjusted by an audiologist.

Step 6: Some hearing aids have a tone control adjustment that emphasizes a certain range of pitches for incoming sound. Depending on the kind of hearing loss a person has, tone controls can markedly affect the clarity of speech heard with the aid. In most hearing aids, these adjustments are inside the aid and are preset for the user.

Step 7: A properly fitted ear mould is a very important part of the hearing aid. A poorly fitted mould will not deliver the full benefit of the aid and may also allow sound to escape, causing 'feedback' - a high pitched squeak. Several consultations may be necessary to ensure a comfortable, snugly fitted ear mould, particularly for those who need a high-powered instrument. A proper lubricant such as Hearwell Gel, applied to the mould, will also help stop sound escaping. In any event, make as many trips to the audiologist as necessary to get a good ear mould fitted.

BE PATIENT - Do not expect too much too soon!

It may take time and practice to adjust to your hearing aid.

Remember, a hearing aid is a device to help you hear better.

It is not a cure for hearing loss.

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