



BEAUTY: In the ear of the beholder

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# Hearing Aids: Pick Function Over Fashion

**E**ven though hearing loss is a life-changing disability, it's easy to be influenced by how a hearing aid looks as opposed to how it works. Formal studies have documented this behavior. Audiologist Mark Ross, PhD, published an interesting article that discussed the positive and negative findings of hearing aid research. He cited one study in which neither the subjects nor the examiners were aware of how a selected group of hearing aids were programmed; they were only told that one aid represented the newest and most "modern" technology, while the other was older and more "conventional." This marketing influence significantly changed the hearing aid choices people made, irrespective of how well the hearing aids performed.<sup>1</sup> It would seem from this study that many hearing aid fitting decisions may not be made simply based on the result of an improvement in hearing.

Hearing patients can make the cosmetics-only fitting mistake based on one or more of the following thought processes:

- 1 Denying the hearing loss: Patient decides, "Smaller hearing aids are for small disabilities."
- 2 Associating hearing loss with aging: Patient decides, "Smaller hearing aids are for younger people."
- 3 Reducing the challenge of a hearing loss: Patient decides, "Smaller hearing aids require fewer life changes."
- 4 Accepting advertised message that cosmetics are more important than function: Patient decides, "The manufacturer knows exactly what people need."
- 5 Concluding that more technology is better: Patient decides, "The more techno-gadgetry, the more the hearing aid will help."
- 6 Rationalizing that an inconspicuous hearing aid worn by one person is the best hearing aid for everyone: Patient decides, "If that hearing aid worked for my dear friend Martha, it will work just as well for me."

## Follow Professional Advice

Here are a few suggestions to help ensure the best hearing aid selection for your hearing loss, without being swayed by biases based on how modern the technology is or how the hearing aid looks:

- Do not tell your audiologist which hearing aid is best for you before your hearing is examined and recommendations are made.
- When your audiologist examines you for a hearing aid, focus on the tasks he or she is assigning to you, without focusing on which hearing aid is being recommended.
- After your audiologist makes a hearing aid recommendation, ask him or her why that recommendation is the best one for you.
- Remember, audiologists work with both function and form. That is, they have the skills to both improve what you hear and recommend the hearing aid that has the best possible cosmetic appearance for you.

As W. C. Fields said, "There comes a time in the affairs of a man when he has to take the bull by the tail and face the situation."<sup>2</sup> Do not go for the hype and buy a hearing aid based simply upon how it appears. Instead, work with your audiologist to make the hearing aid perform well and look pleasing.

## REFERENCES

1. Ross, Mark. Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Hearing Enhancement. Accessed via [www.hearingresearch.org/Dr.Ross/Hearing\\_Aid\\_Research\\_Pos\\_Neg.htm](http://www.hearingresearch.org/Dr.Ross/Hearing_Aid_Research_Pos_Neg.htm).
2. Rayburn, Kevin. Quotes from (and about) W.C. Fields. Accessed via [www.louisville.edu/~kprayb01/WCQuote.html#A3](http://www.louisville.edu/~kprayb01/WCQuote.html#A3).

## moreinfo

Better Hearing Institute:  
[www.betterhearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org)

Self Help for the Hard of Hearing People Inc. (SHHH):  
[www.shhh.org](http://www.shhh.org)

A. G. Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing:  
[www.agbell.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?linkid=1](http://www.agbell.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?linkid=1)

The Pennsylvania State University Communication Sciences and Disorders, Outreach Clinics and Programs:  
[http://csd.hhdev.psu.edu/outreach/out\\_clinprog.html](http://csd.hhdev.psu.edu/outreach/out_clinprog.html)

