

What Will Hearing Aids Do for Me?

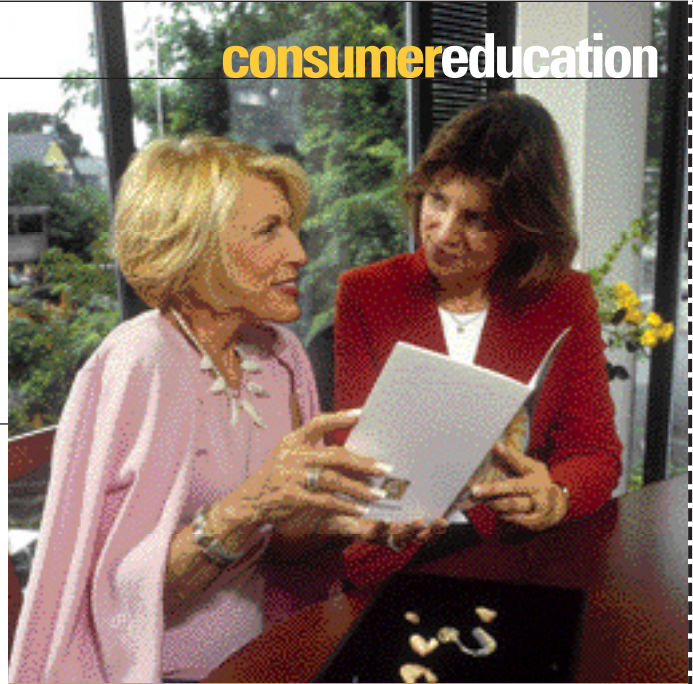
Perhaps the single most important goal when considering the use of a hearing aid is to improve personal communication with friends, family and others and yet maintain independence and freedom to make choices in a world of fast-paced communication. For people with hearing loss, a hearing aid frequently helps to achieve this goal. For the purpose of this article, a hearing aid is defined as a device that is inserted in the outer ear or ear canal in one or both ears. There are three important things to understand about hearing aids.

1 Hearing aids do not repair a hearing loss. Hearing aids are fitted to patients for a variety of reasons. The most common reason is to help them hear speech in order to effectively communicate. The hearing loss is generally sensorineural (permanent hearing loss), and the hearing aid is adjusted mechanically and electronically to help compensate for parts of the ear and central nervous system that are permanently damaged.¹

2 A hearing aid is a guest in the ear. Hearing aids work well when they are fitted comfortably to a person's ear. Patients that are first fitted with a hearing aid generally experience some level of tenderness in the ear. The level of tenderness may be as simple as adjusting to a new pair of shoes, or it may be an irritation that requires an audiologist to make adjustments for the hearing aid to feel as natural as possible.

3 Hearing aids require guided practice, patience and persistence. Hearing aids work best in quiet listening conditions. Adjusting to everyday sounds is challenging and takes practice (e.g. birds, dishes and silverware

making contact, doors opening and closing, computer keyboard noises). As noise is added from different sources (restaurants,



EXPECTATIONS: Hearing aid successes require patience and practice.

malls, busy streets, crowds, etc.) to a quiet listening condition, the listener may begin to experience problems.

Patience and realistic expectations now become key ingredients to being a successful hearing aid user. Because people have different degrees of hearing loss and have had hearing loss for different periods of time, listening problems vary dramatically in magnitude and type among people. A patient that expects a hearing aid to bring normal or near normal hearing in all listening environments is a patient that is likely to be disappointed. A realistic patient will have an understanding of the need for guided practice and patience in using the hearing aid and will be persistent in discovering where and when the hearing aid is (and is not) most helpful. A realistic patient will also be a wise, successful and satisfied patient.

Partnering for Success

A hearing aid that is fitted properly and used successfully should create a communication environment where most other people do not realize that the listener is wearing a hearing aid. Working with a certified and licensed audiologist is the best way to ensure that a hearing aid will serve the patient well.

Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence. To survive in the world, we have to act in concert with others, but to survive as ourselves, rather than simply as cogs in a wheel, we have to act alone.²

REFERENCES

1. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (n.d.). Retrieved March 5, 2006, from www.nidcd.nih.gov
2. Tannen, D. (1990). You just don't understand: women and men in conversation. Retrieved March 5, 2006, from www.bartleby.com/66/8/57108.htm

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Better Hearing Institute:
www.betterhearing.org

Hearing Loss Association of America:
www.hearingloss.org

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