



DEPARTMENT OF OTOLARYNGOLOGY

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# Hearing Aids for Adults

## Frequently Asked Questions



Singapore  
General Hospital

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SingHealth

## **What is a hearing aid?**

A hearing aid is an electronic, battery-operated device that amplifies and processes sound to allow the hearing impaired person to hear better. Hearing aids receive sound through a microphone, which then converts the sound waves to electrical signals. The amplifier increases the loudness of the signals and then sends the sound to the ear through a speaker. A hearing aid is not the only solution to the problems of hearing loss - it forms part of a programme to rehabilitate the hearing impaired.

## **How can hearing aids help?**

Hearing aids are useful in improving the hearing and speech comprehension of people with hearing loss. However, a hearing aid does not restore hearing to normal as there is already damage to the ear. When choosing a hearing aid, the audiologist will consider each individual's hearing ability, work and home activities, physical limitations, medical conditions and cosmetic preferences. For many people, cost is also an important factor. The audiologist will work with you to decide which hearing aid is most suitable for you.

## **Can the same hearing aid fit all?**

No. Since there are many types and degrees of hearing loss, hearing aids have to be individually fitted. The audiologist will assist each patient to select a hearing aid that is suitable for his hearing loss and personal needs.

## **What are the different classes of hearing aids?**

There are three basic classes of hearing aids, categorised according to their sound processing strategy:

- Analogue hearing aids amplify the sounds according to their waveforms, but usually offer less flexibility in terms of adjustment to meet the individual's hearing loss.
- Programmable hearing aids are actually analogue aids, but can be adjusted using a computer. They provide more flexibility and most of them can have more than one programme or setting to accommodate a given listening environment.

- Digital hearing aids convert the analogue signals into digital signals, which can be modified using a computer to suppress certain background noise and improve speech clarity. They are the most advanced classes of hearing aids in the market right now.

### What are the different styles of hearing aids available?

Completely in-the-canal (CIC) is the smallest and least-visible hearing aid, as it is largely concealed in the ear canal. As it is used for mild to moderately severe hearing loss, it is usually unsuitable for those with severe hearing loss.



In-the-canal (ITC) hearing aid is larger in size than the CIC model, and is usually used for mild to moderately severe hearing loss.

In-the-ear (ITE) hearing aid is larger than the ITC and is usually used for mild to severe hearing loss.



Behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aid is worn hanging on the ear with a custom ear mould that fits inside the ear. The amplified sound will travel from the hearing aid through the ear mould into the ear. BTE aid is used by people of all ages for mild to profound hearing loss.

### Will a small hearing aid fall off or drop inside the ear?

Usually, the shape of a patient's ear will be cast into a mould and made into a custom ear shell, so that the hearing aid will fit snugly in the ear. If the ear shell is well made and placed correctly in the ear, it should not fall off or drop inside the ear when he or she engages in non-vigorous activities such as walking and eating.

In addition, the ear shell also prevents the sound from 'leaking' out of the ear and hence improves the quality of sound. As such, hearing aids are not available on the spot but have to be custom-made to fit the size and shape of the ear of each individual.

### **How long does it take to get used to wearing a hearing aid?**

The time needed to get used to a hearing aid varies from one person to another. For most patients, the hearing loss occurred gradually over many years. Therefore, it takes time for them to adjust to listening to many sounds which they have probably forgotten, or have been hearing a distorted version.

Analogue hearing aids not only amplify speech but also background noise, which makes following a conversation in a noisy environment difficult. Better digital hearing aids can improve speech in some noisy situations by making it clearer, but it is not as good as compared to normal hearing. However, with patience, perseverance and practice, listening can once again be an enjoyable experience for the hearing impaired.

### **How do I maintain the hearing aid?**

Your hearing aid comes with an instruction manual, please read it carefully on tips to care for your hearing aid. Once you have obtained your hearing aid, the audiologist will go through the maintenance process in detail with you. However, do remember that your hearing aid is not waterproof and only the ear mould of the BTE can be washed. One of the most common problems is earwax being trapped in the soundbore. It is thus important that you clean your hearing aid regularly according to the instruction manual to prevent wax blockage.

### **How long does a hearing aid last?**

The manufacturer usually provides a warranty period of up to one year. After this period, it depends on how well you maintain the hearing aid. On an average, hearing aids usually last about 4 to 5 years.

## Are there any side effects from the use of hearing aids?

Although a battery is being used in the hearing aid, the voltage (1.4V) is too low to emit any harmful radiation. Sudden loud sounds such as thunder would not cause any trauma as hearing aids come with a filter to block out loud sounds.

## How much does a hearing aid cost?

In general, analogue hearing aids are the cheapest, followed by programmable hearing aids, while the digital hearing aids are the most expensive.

- **Analogue** Price may range from several hundred dollars to over a thousand dollars
- **Programmable** Price may range from several hundred dollars to over a thousand dollars
- **Digital** Price may range from several hundred dollars to several thousands dollars

## Why are hearing aids so expensive?

Hearing aids are specialised devices and intensive research has been put in to develop ways to improve their sound quality, hence resulting in the higher costs.

## Buying a hearing aid is an important investment, how can I be sure that I will benefit from it?


Few people will NOT benefit from hearing aids. The aid makes it easier for the patient to hear sounds. However, it does not guarantee better speech clarity. Based on your profile, the audiologist can determine the benefits and outcome with the use of the hearing aid, but these are largely dependent on your attitude towards using a hearing aid. Nevertheless, we must remember that every individual is different, and thus may have different outcome and results.

## I really need a hearing aid, but cannot afford one

Patients who faced financial difficulty will be referred to the hospital's Medical Social Services Department for assistance.



 Bus Stop

 SGH Shuttle Bus Stop

 Taxi Stand

## ENT Diagnostic Unit

Block 3 Basement 1

### Appointments

Please consult your primary physician first for an initial examination. He would make a referral for you if you require specialist treatment. Appointments can be made via phone.

Phone : 6326 6872 / 4 / 6

Fax : 6227 3550

### Clinic Hours

Monday to Friday : 9.00am to 5.00pm



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