

Hearing Aid Care, Maintenance and Proper Expectations



MARKHAM HEARING CENTRE

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Now That You Have Hearing Aids, You Must Take Care of Them.

Q: I recently purchased a set of in-the-ear hearing aids. I want to be sure that I am caring for them properly. What should I do to clean them?

A: When you remove the hearing aids at night, the first thing you should do is carefully wipe them down with a dry soft cloth or Kleenex. Next, inspect the portion of the hearing aid that fits down into the ear canal. If you observe earwax accumulating at the end of the aid, you will need to remove this. Most manufacturers will provide you with a cleaning tool, which may be in the form of a brush, wire pick or combination of both. Carefully, remove the wax. Using the brush provided for you, carefully brush around and in the plastic tubing to clear out the wax. Some patients find that using an old toothbrush is an effective method for wax removal. Use the wire pick to clean the opening of the aid but never push the wire pick down the instrument. Finally, open the battery door and place the hearing aids in their case. Many hearing aids have an independent on/off switch. It is still advisable to open the battery door to allow air to enter the hearing aid and assist in reducing the effects of moisture that may accumulate when the aids are in the ear canal. It also helps prolong battery life.

Q: I have a behind-the-ear style hearing aid. Is the cleaning procedure any different for this type of hearing aid?

A: The basic cleaning procedure is the same. The only real difference is that there is an earmold, which is made of lucite or silicone. Since, this is the non-electronic portion of the hearing aid, you may wash the earmold with a mild soap and water. Many patients will actually disconnect the earmold from the hearing aid and place in a soapy bath for a few minutes. Make sure the earmold is dry and pay special attention to the earmold tubing to be sure no water is trapped. If it is, simply blow on the end of the tubing to clear the water before reattaching the earmold to the hearing aid. Or with the mold completely removed from the device let it dry overnight or use an earmold air blower to remove any excess water or moisture within the tube. Remember to remove the mold from the hearing aid to ensure that no water/moisture will come in contact with the electrical components of the hearing aid. Remember to have the tubing replaced every 6-12 months, as it begins to lose its flexibility.



To re-attach the earmold to the hearing instrument:

Make sure that the curve of the earmold matches that of the hearing instrument (see below)





Example of a hearing instrument cleaning kit.

Q: Is it advisable to use alcohol swabs or cleaning solvents on the hearing aid?

A: No, do not use solvents or alcohol on the hearing aids as there is a possibility that they can breakdown the hearing aid material. There are special sprays you can purchase that are designed specifically for the cleaning and disinfecting of hearing aids. Talk to your hearing healthcare professional about these products.

Q: What precautions can I take to ensure that my hearing aids will operate properly?

A: I usually describe this in my “List of Don’t’s”. Don’t allow the hearing aid to become wet. Avoid showering, bathing, or going into the swimming pool or sauna with the hearing aids in your ears.

Don’t place the hearing aids in direct heat. It is tempting sometimes to place a damp hearing aid in the microwave or

conventional oven. Unfortunately, the heat will damage the hearing aids in rather short order. To dry the hearing aid, simply open the battery door and allow it to dry out on its own or hold a hair dryer 18 to 24 inches from the hearing aid and direct warm air toward the aid for approximately 5-10 minutes. There are also special dehumidifiers or desiccants available that do a wonderful job in drying out the hearing aid. Talk to your hearing health care professional about these items. Remember never store the hearing aids near direct sunlight or a heat source. Do not store them in your car during hot days.

Don’t drop the hearing aid. If the hearing aid falls on a carpet, rug or upholstered furniture it usually will not cause the aid any harm. Hard floored surfaces or counter tops have the potential of damaging the hearing instruments. Many individuals will start with a pillow on their laps or a towel on the table or counter while they are learning to insert the hearing aids in their ears. Keep the aids away from small children and pets.



Q: How long do hearing aid batteries last?

A: Hearing aid batteries can last from three days to three weeks, depending on the size of the battery and hearing aid, how many hours the aid is worn, the volume the aid is set at and how much power it is using (greater the hearing loss the more power used). Batteries in digital hearing aids tend to get approximately 80 hours of use.

Changing the battery

Remove the colored tab from the zinc air battery before inserting it into the hearing aid. Insert the battery so the "+" sign on the battery matches the "+" sign imprinted on the battery door. To ensure that the battery is working properly, close the battery compartment. Cup your hand around the hearing aid. A whistling or squealing sound indicates that the battery is working properly.




Below is a table designed to help you determine when you should change the batteries in your hearing aid. The exact battery life you experience may differ from the information below.

Hearing Aid Model	Battery Type	Battery Life (Hours)	Change Battery Life Every*
BTE	#13	144 hours	12 days
CIC	#10	88 hours	5-6 days
MC	#10	88 hours	5-6 days
ITC	#10	71 hours	5-6 days
ITC	#312	133 hours	11 days
HS	#312	100 hours	8 days
ITE	#312	100 hours	8 days
ITE	#13	196 hours	16 days

*Approximate number of days assuming 12 hours of wear time per day

Suggestions for New Hearing Aid Users

- Use your hearing aid(s) in familiar environments for the first few days.
- During the first few days following your hearing aid(s) fitting, wear them for as long as they are comfortable. This is usually 3 - 4 hours/day.
- To get accustomed to listening to speech with your hearing aid(s), it is best to only listen to one person at a time, then gradually increase the number of persons with whom you communicate.
- Don't strain to hear every word. Let your brain fill in the gaps. Try to get the overall message of the conversation.
- At first practice locating where the sound is coming from.
- It is best to gradually increase your tolerance for loud sounds. For example, don't begin your new hearing aid experience by going to a noisy restaurant or social function.
- Practice your ability to tell apart different speech sounds. For example, "Did you say Cat or Hat?"
- Listen to something being read aloud while following along on your own copy.
- Gradually increase the number of situations in which you use hearing aid(s). For example, first try them at home, then at the grocery store, etc.
- Hearing aids can have the ability to help you to hear better on the phone. If your hearing aid has a telephone switch, practice using the telephone while wearing your hearing aid.



What I should realistically expect from my hearing aid?

- Your hearing in quiet environments (one on one conversations, watching TV, etc.) should be improved.
- Your hearing in moderate background noise should be improved.
- Your hearing in loud background noise should be **NO WORSE** than without the hearing aid(s).
- Soft speech should be audible (able to hear); average speech should be comfortable; loud speech should be loud, but not uncomfortable.
- Your hearing aid(s) or earmold(s) should fit comfortably.
- Your own voice should be “acceptable” to you. There is an adjustment period of this.
- There should be no feedback (whistling) once

the hearing aid(s) are properly seated in your ears and at your preferred volume level.

- You may hear sounds you have not heard for a while (like footsteps, paper rustling or the refrigerator humming). This is not abnormal, but simply requires time to get used to.
- Your hearing aids should allow you to listen with less effort.

Be patient! It requires time to adjust to hearing aids. Your listening skills should improve gradually as you get used to wearing them. Over time, you may even request them to be turned up.

Hearing aids **WILL NOT** restore your hearing capabilities to “normal” or to pre-existing levels. Instead, the goal is to improve your hearing ability and overall quality of life.

Strategies for becoming a better listener



- Look at the person who is speaking. Position yourself so that you get a full view of their face. A lot of information can be gained by watching as well as listening.
- Wear your glasses as they can help you to speech read.
- Sit with your better ear, if one is worse, toward the speaker.
- Reduce the distance between you and the person talking. The ideal distance is approximately 3 - 5 feet.
- Avoid carrying on conversations from another room.
- Concentrate on the thought or ideas of what the speaker is expressing rather than straining to understand every word that is being said. Many

times speech is redundant and you are able to fill in the blanks.

- Try to be aware of the topic of conversation and use environmental cues (gestures such as pointing to the newspaper to help you make an educated guess. Friends can be coached to give occasional leads about the subject being discussed. Such as, “We are discussing the election that was in the newspaper”. Or be proactive and ask someone what is being discussed.
- Become familiar with the way different people express themselves: facial expression, vocabulary, accent etc.
- Maintain an active interest in people and events such as, world events and of those within your community (family and friends). This will allow you to follow conversations more easily.

- Don't bluff and nod as if you understand when you don't. It is better to ask questions than to continue along the wrong path.
- Don't hesitate to ask someone to repeat information you may have missed. To avoid time and frustration, be very specific about what you have missed so that the person does not have to repeat the whole message. E.g. "What did you say about the election on Saturday?" You may also want to ask the person to rephrase what was said, so that you can fill in the blanks of what you missed.
- Don't just say, "What did you say?" This does not give the speaker the necessary information to get the message across to you. Tell them if they're speaking too softly, if their hand was in front of their face, or if the background noise prevented you from understanding.
- Work at listening. Don't get into the habit of allowing someone else such as your spouse/friend to listen for you.
- Remember that conversation is a 2-way interaction. Do not control or direct the conversation. Listening takes more energy than talking.
- Acknowledge your hearing loss and ask for help.
- Don't hesitate to tell those around you what they can do to make communication easier. Inform them that natural unexaggerated speech is easiest for you to understand. There is no need to shout.
- Ask for specifics in writing such as medical information or directions.
- Maximize the use of lighting. Have the light behind you, not behind the speaker where it may cast a shadow on their face and disrupt your ability to speech read.
- Resist distractions. Try to reduce background noise. This would include turning off or down the television, radio or anything else that is distracting your ability to understand. In a social setting you may want to find a quieter corner.
- Close open doors or windows that are facing a noisy or busy area. This will help to lower the background noise. It is also helpful to keep the car window closed and to lower the volume of the hearing aid which is closest to the open car window.
- If needed, consider improving the acoustics of a room that is frequently used for conversations. This may involve such things as installing carpet, draperies and padded furniture.
- When going out to restaurants, try to make plans in advance. Go during off peak hours, sit away from the kitchen, reserve a table in a quiet corner, request a booth if it is available. If your hearing aid does not have a directional microphone, try to sit with you back against the wall to reduce background noise. (Ask your audiologist about directional microphones).
- When attending a play, concert, or church service, try to arrive early so that you can get a seat close to the front. The further you are from the speaker the more difficult it will be to hear them. Check to see if they have a listening device, called an audioloop system.

- When going to a movie or play, read the reviews in advance in order to get an idea of the plot in advance.
- When taking information over the phone, repeat it back to verify it is correct.
- Understand realistic expectations about what you will be able to hear in various situations and environments. Expect some situations to be more difficult to hear, even with your hearing aid(s). In these situations you will have to use more effort and good communication strategies. Be proactive!
- Check the situation in public places before blaming your hearing loss or hearing aid(s). Others may be having difficulty as well. It may be due to a faulty P.A. system, or high background noise. Don't be too hard on yourself.
- Everyone needs time to relax. Recognize that illness and fatigue will make listening more difficult. Allow yourself the luxury of withdrawing at times.
- Avoid tension. Try to relax and keep a sense of humor. Tension interferes greatly with the ability to speech read and drains energy. Even the best listeners cannot hear everything.





Troubleshooting

The volume drops

- Low battery – replace it.
- The sound outlet is blocked with earwax – clean with a small brush. Change the cerumen filter.
- Blocked microphone inlet – consult your hearingcare professional.

The instrument “whistles” in the ear

- The instrument is not correctly inserted in your ear. Try again.
- The instrument is in the wrong ear – swap it over.
- The fit of the instrument is too loose – consult your hearingcare professional.
- There is wax in the ear - clean it out.

The instrument does not work

- There is no battery in it – insert one.
- The battery compartment is not closed – shut it.
- The battery is dirty – clean the battery surface.
- The battery is dead – replace it.
- Impacted with wax - clean it.

The instrument slips out of your ear

- The ear canal is wet or dirty – wipe the hearing instrument and your ear with a soft, dry cloth.
- Jaw moves and pushes it out - may require a canal lock.

The instrument hurts your ear

- The instrument is not correctly positioned – remove and re-insert it. If the problem persists, consult your hearingcare professional.
- It may require grinding of the aid or remaking it .

The instrument is difficult to insert

- Place a small drop of non-irritating lubricant on your finger and smear onto the ear canal entrance before inserting your instrument. Ensure that no lubricant enters the sound outlet or microphone apertures.

Important

If the suggestions above do not solve the problem, contact your hearingcare professional at Markham Hearing Centre who would gladly assist you.



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