



Self Help for Hard of Hearing People



The official website for Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (Australia) Inc

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Information Sheets

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Information Sheet Number 6

TOO OLD TO HEAR? NEVER!

A GUIDE FOR SENIORS

- Do people seem to mumble when they speak to you?
- Do they complain that your television is too loud?
- Do you get strange looks when you answer to what you thought you heard?

Perhaps you are facing the problems of diminished hearing. This happens to one in three of us by age sixty – and to almost one in two by the age of eighty. Next to arthritis, hearing loss is the second most commonly reported disability in Australia.

So, if you have difficulty in hearing, you are not the only pebble on the beach – over one million Australians share your problem.

The good news is that something positive can be done to cope with hearing loss – provided we accept the challenge.

As time passes it becomes harder for us to adapt to change, learn new techniques, and handle new technology. If we want to continue to enjoy our family and social contacts the time for action is **right now!**

Why Do We Not Hear So Well?

There are many causes of hearing loss. We may have an inherited condition, or disease, certain medications, or an accident may be a factor.

In older people, the ageing process itself often causes a progressive deterioration in the sensitivity of the ear to some sounds. Exposure to loud music, iPods and prolonged exposure to high levels of noise – as in some work places – may have been the cause of a “noise induced hearing loss” or “industrial deafness.”

For most older people, the higher frequency (higher pitched) sounds are the first affected. Many of the sounds of speech fall into the high frequency range. If we cannot hear these sounds, some words will not be clear and we will have difficulty understanding words and sentences. We may find, for instance, that we cannot easily hear the difference between the two questions: “Do you sleep well?” and “Do your feet swell?”

The often heard complaint is **“HE CAN HEAR WHEN WE WANT TO!”**
The reality is **“HE HEARS WHEN HE CAN!”**

The Effects of Hearing Loss

Because your hearing loss has developed slowly over a number of years, you may not have noticed that you are having a problem. The television volume has crept up and up. The number of missed and misunderstood words has increased. Phone conversations may be increasingly difficult. Or you have not heard the person in the other room talking to you. Because of the embarrassment of giving inappropriate replies, we may well have decided to avoid some social situations. We generally become withdrawn and, whether we admit it or not, we then become isolated and lonely.

Unless WE ARE PREPARED TO MAKE AN EFFORT, we may soon find that others will not take the extra time and patience needed to communicate with us.

Where to Get Help

- Your local doctor will check for any condition which may respond to medical or surgical treatment. Any build up of wax in the ear should be cleared.
- You are eligible for free hearing assessment and hearing aids under the Government's Hearing Program if you hold an appropriate Commonwealth Pensioner Card **OR** a Gold Repatriation Health Card or a White Repatriation Card with hearing loss as a special condition **OR** you are a spouse of the above. Phone the Office of Hearing Services to confirm eligibility and get the necessary voucher with all details on Freecall 1800 500 726.
- Some public hospitals have free audiology services for hearing tests.
- There are private hearing aid providers listed in the Yellow Pages if you are not eligible for the Government program. Ensure that all testing is done by a qualified audiologist or audiometrist.

For more detailed information on these services ask for the SHHH Information Sheet No. 3: *How Do I Get a Hearing Aid?*

Hearing Assessment

Once it has been established that no medical or surgical treatment is indicated, an audiologist at any of the services listed above will test your hearing thoroughly and discuss ways in which you could be helped. If you have a mild hearing loss, assistive listening devices may make life easier for you – and for those around you. If your loss is more severe, a hearing aid may be the answer.

About Hearing Aids

All hearing aids amplify sound and deliver it directly to the ear. Just like spectacles, aids are prescribed for the particular requirements of each wearer – yours will compensate for your particular hearing loss. In some cases the nature and degree of your hearing loss will determine the kind of aid which is suitable for you, but sometimes you will have a choice.

When purchasing a hearing aid you would be wise indeed to choose on the basis of its potential usefulness. Do not be swayed by promotions for very small aids which promise miraculous results while “no one knows you are wearing one.” With the maturity and wisdom of our years, we should be alert to any attempts by commercial interests to exploit our vanity!

Hearing aids may be worn behind the ear or completely in the ear. These will be the options for most people, although body-worn aids or other special purpose aids may be appropriate in some cases.

A Behind-the-Ear Aid (BTE)



An In-the-Ear Aid (ITE)



NB: These aids are illustrations only – design and controls will vary.

- Typical behind-the-ear and in-the-ear aids are illustrated – controls and markings will vary on aids of different manufacture. You will see that the smaller the aid, the smaller the switch and volume controls. The battery is also smaller. If your fingers are no longer nimble or if your vision is impaired you may have some difficulty with these. Be sure to handle the aid and try all the controls before making a decision. You may manage the larger behind-the-ear aid or a body-worn aid more easily. Some aids have remote control units. These also require some degree of manual dexterity, and the ability to understand and handle new technology. **ASK FOR A TRIAL PERIOD BEFORE COMMITTING YOURSELF.**
- We strongly recommend that you ask your audiologist or audiometrist about the benefits of hearing aids which include a telecoil – a T switch. This feature allows for use of assistive listening devices which can give extra help in listening situations which, because of background noise, many hearing aid wearers find difficult. If you enjoy television, if you use the telephone, if you go to church, the cinema or theatre or if you attend social gatherings or meetings, you will appreciate the benefits of this feature.
- **The good news is that there should be no additional cost for having an aid fitted with a telecoil if it is done at the time of the original fitting.** There may be a small charge if it has to be programmed into the aid later.
- Because we have become used to increasingly muffled sounds over the years, as our hearing gradually deteriorated, it is a change to hear the distinct, sharper sounds our aids deliver. And we do not always like change!
- **Allow yourself a period of adjustment.** It takes time to learn to manage hearing aids well and to learn good listening tactics.

- It will also take patience, perseverance**and practice!**

Remember . . .

Our hearing loss affects not only ourselves, but also our family and friends – those who want to communicate with us and whose warmth and care will be so important to us in the years to come. So, we have to play our part in facilitating communication with them.

There are many excellent services and devices which can help us to hear better. We should use them. **If we have a positive attitude** to our hearing loss – if we learn to manage it well - we can confidently believe that for most of us . . .

WE ARE NEVER TOO OLD TO HEAR! NEVER!

(Revision 3)