



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 13

CARER'S GUIDE TO MANAGING HEARING LOSS

A **Carer** is a family member, parent, partner, significant other, friend or neighbour who provides care on an unpaid basis. The person they support may have a chronic illness, disability, mental illness or may be frail. (*Definition - Carers Coalition NSW*).

Does the person you care for also have a hearing loss? Does the extra effort necessary to communicate add to:

- your everyday workload and make you even more tired and stressed?
- the hearing impaired person's isolation and frustration?
- a communication barrier which makes both of you frustrated and harder to live with?

SHHH Australia is a volunteer organisation which has worked since 1983 to assist hearing impaired people, their families and friends to overcome some of these difficulties through practical information and sympathetic, helpful suggestions when needed.

SHHH emphasises “self help” because under normal circumstances, individuals with a hearing loss must first admit to the loss and then be prepared to put in the necessary effort to do something about it. In the case of hearing impaired people requiring care, the necessary work to manage their hearing loss will be shared by both the person and the Carer.

This SHHH Information Sheet is designed to provide you, the Carer, with information to help the hearing impaired person to better cope with their loss and to give you ideas about how life can be made easier for you both. Remember, while a hearing loss cannot ever be restored to its original quality, there are many things that can be done to manage the hearing loss.

A full assessment of a hearing loss is best obtained from a hearing professional. This test can be made by an **audiologist** (they have a university degree with postgraduate qualifications in audiology) or a qualified **audiometrist** (they have completed a certificate course in hearing aid audiometry and/or received in-house training from the hearing aid industry).

ARE YOU CARING FOR A PERSON WHO IS NOT ADMITTING TO A HEARING LOSS?

Many people deny that they cannot hear well even when others tell them:

- because hearing loss is usually very gradual and it has to be obvious before they realise it;
- because they would rather blame others for ‘mumbling’ or even ‘talking behind their backs’;
- because there is a reluctance on the part of many people to admit to the hearing loss. They may think it means they are getting older, less able or less attractive.

If the person you care for is capable of being taken for a professional hearing assessment, it will require that he/she responds to certain sounds and instructions. This can precisely determine whether there is a loss and to what degree. Additionally, if the person is not mobile you might also have to consider a home visit by the audiologist or audiometrist.

HEARING AIDS

A medical examination should precede the hearing assessment to ascertain if there are medical problems that affect the person’s hearing or their use of aids.

Then a professional hearing assessment can be conducted as discussed above. Arranging such an assessment will depend on the person's mobility, capability to respond adequately to instructions, and (in some cases) financial position.

In Australia, the Federal Government Hearing Program provides free professional assessment, hearing aids, and follow up assistance to eligible people. If this applies in your case, a discussion with the appropriate professionals will help you organise the assessment.

If government assistance is not applicable, then, after the appropriate assessment, it will be necessary to purchase the aids commercially. See SHHH Information Sheet No 3: "*How Do I Get a Hearing Aid?*".

Hearing aids will offer the greatest benefit overall if properly chosen, properly used, adequately tolerated and affordable.

Choice:

There are many models and types of hearing aids on the market. New technologies are being developed all the time. The aid chosen must be suitable for the assessed level of hearing loss as recommended by your professional audiologist or audiometrist. The choice that is made should not be based on vanity, a desire to have 'the latest' (whether it is needed or not) or how much it costs. The "best hearing aid" is the one which best suits the individual's needs.

Suitability:

The issues you need to take into consideration prior to choosing a hearing aid are the *ability* and *ease* of the hearing impaired person to:

- put it on
- switch it on
- adjust the sound levels to their requirements
- benefit from any additional features, e.g. a telecoil (T-switch)
- care for and maintain it
- change batteries
- clear wax from the tubes.

The aid which sits in a drawer unused helps no one.

Toleration (ability to use):

If the hearing impaired person you care for is unlikely or unable to tolerate the hearing aid in the ear for whatever reason, it may be better for you to make the decision to try some other Assistive Listening Device (ALD) instead. See SHHH Information Sheet No 9 titled: "*Assistive Listening Devices*".

Affordability:

If eligible for the Government Program, hearing aids are supplied free of charge. The Program provides whatever features are required to meet the hearing needs of the individual at no charge other than a small annual fee for batteries and repairs. Additional features may be available as a "top up" at the users own expense.

If the individual is not eligible for the Government Program, the cost of hearing aids will be significant depending on type, model etc. In all cases the hearing aid selected must meet the person's hearing needs if the aid is to be of any use.

Note: No matter whether the aid is purchased commercially or received through the Government Program, ask for a telecoil (formerly known as a T switch) to be fitted if the size of the aid allows. This will not add to the cost if done at the time of ordering, and will enable the wearer to take advantage of induction hearing loops which are installed in many theatres, churches and other public venues, as well as benefit from some of the assistive listening devices which can be purchased for home use.

For further information see the SHHH Information Sheets: "*What is a Telecoil?*", "*Hearing Aid Checklist*", and "*Care and Maintenance of Hearing Aids*".

Remember:

- Hearing aids are complex tools programmed for a specific hearing loss; they are not miracles or toys. Illness, age and attitude will all impact upon the benefits received from hearing aids.
- In order to receive maximum benefit, an effort must be made by the wearer or the Carer to use and maintain the hearing aids properly.
- No hearing aid can give back normal hearing.
- Hearing aids work on very small batteries. The smaller the aid, the smaller the battery and the harder it is to change. Batteries must be changed properly and frequently. For maximum battery life, the user must remember to turn off the aid when not in use. Importantly, old batteries must be discarded so as not to become mixed up with the new batteries.
- Modern technology has made it possible for hearing aids to be made smaller, but small hearing aids can pose a handling problem for those with arthritic hands or poor sight. Small hearing aids are more likely to be dropped or lost, or even left in a pocket and put through the wash.
- Digital technology has made possible some advances in the production and fitting of hearing aids, but the extra cost of digital hearing aids may not be justified.

CARER'S TASKS

How to keep the hearing aid in good repair and in use

- Check if the battery is working. If it is, the aid will whistle if switched on in the open.
- Check for wax. Remove wax carefully with small wax hook or pin.
- Wash the mould at least once per month, or as required.
WARNING: An in-the-ear hearing aid must not be washed, but should be wiped with a tissue daily.
- Check for moisture build-up. Disconnect the mould and give it a good shake or use a puffer.
- Check that the hearing aid is put in properly and turned on.
- Discard old batteries; don't keep them around.

Communication techniques

Communication is a two-way process. There are certain techniques which hearing impaired persons and hearing persons should practice all the time, whether the person wears a hearing aid or not. These techniques cost nothing, require no special equipment and do much to reduce stress and frustration for all. See SHHH Information Sheet No 2: *"Ideas for Hearing Impaired People: Improving Communication"*.

Tips for helping hearing impaired people

- Hearing impaired people usually hear better sitting in the front seat of the car.
- Face the hearing impaired person when you are speaking. Eye to eye contact is also helpful.
- Avoid background noise when speaking, i.e. T.V. and radio should be turned down or, preferably, off.
- Rephrase, if necessary, for the hearing impaired person, e.g. "What will the weather be tomorrow?" could be "Will it be sunny tomorrow?"
- Don't shout: words just become more distorted for the hearing aid wearer.
- Be patient: don't become exasperated or ridicule or make fun of the hearing impaired person's inability to understand what is being said.

If the hearing aid is whistling:

- Check that the in-the-ear (ITE) aid or ear mould is properly inserted and fitting snugly.
- Check that the aid is not turned up too high.
- If the hearing aid wearer has lost considerable weight, a new ear mould may need to be made.
- Get the G.P. to check if there is a build up of wax in the ear.

Points to remember

- Hearing impaired people don't hear as well when they are tired or sick or having to listen for long periods of time.
- Put yourself on the same level as the hearing impaired person when talking to them – stand or sit.
- Check that what you said was heard correctly.
- Use facial expression or gestures when talking to the hearing impaired person.
- Try to maintain your patience and remain relaxed.
- Encourage the hearing impaired person to keep practising using their hearing aid(s). Try to impress upon them that this is a genuine instance where "practice will make perfect".
- Be aware that a return visit to the hearing aid provider may be necessary for adjustments.

If possible, visit a **SHHH Hearing Information Centre** to speak with our volunteers and try out various Assistive Listening Devices. We have two Hearing Information Centres in the Sydney metropolitan area. No appointment is necessary and no charge is made.

TURRAMURRA: Hillview Community Health Centre
1334 Pacific Hwy, Turrumurra – opposite train station
Open Tuesday, Thursday and Friday – 10am to 3pm.

CANTERBURY: Canterbury Hospital, Thorncraft Parade, Campsie
Open Monday 10am to 3pm.

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