

Life with hearing aids



ACTION ON
HEARING
LOSS

You'll find this leaflet helpful if you want to find out how to look after your hearing aids and get the most out of them, whether you're new to hearing aids or have been wearing them for a while. We tell you how to fit, use and take care of your hearing aids, so you can get back to enjoying conversation, TV, music and much more.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact our free Information Line:

Telephone	0808 808 0123
Textphone	0808 808 9000
SMS	0780 000 0360 (standard text message rates apply)
Email	information@hearingloss.org.uk



This leaflet is a must-read for anyone with hearing aids. It can be a struggle to adjust to hearing aids at first – but, believe me, it's worth persevering!

Emma Holmes

Contents

- What should I expect from my hearing aids?.....4
- How long will it take me to get used to my hearing aids?.....4
- What's the right way to fit my hearing aids?.....5
- What's the best way to get used to my hearing aids?.....8
- What is the hearing loop setting?.....9
- What other useful hearing aid settings are there?.....10
- What's the best way to clean my hearing aids?.....10
- How often do I need to change the batteries?.....13
- Where can I get new batteries?.....14
- What about repairs and replacements?.....14
- What should I check if my hearing aid isn't working properly?..17
- Where can I get further support with my hearing aids?.....19
- How can lipreading help?.....20
- Where can I get further information?.....23

What should I expect from my hearing aids?

Your hearing aids should make the sounds you find difficult to hear louder. They can't give you perfect hearing, but they should help you to hear speech and everyday sounds – such as the doorbell and telephone ringing – more clearly.

Most hearing aids are also designed to reduce certain kinds of background noise, such as the rumble of traffic or the whirr of a fan. This makes listening more comfortable, but you might still struggle to pick out one voice from general chatter, as hearing aids can't cut out background noise completely. That's where lipreading can help (see page 20).

Wearing hearing aids should never make sounds uncomfortably loud or make your hearing worse. You might find that your natural hearing seems dull when you take your hearing aids out, but that's because you've become used to hearing better while using them.

How long will it take me to get used to my hearing aids?

It's not unusual for it to take a while to get used to wearing hearing aids – the feeling of them in your ears, how to use them and the new sounds that you can hear. Research shows that, on average, it takes around 30 days to become used to hearing aids and get the most out of them, but it can take up to a few months – everyone's different.

At first, the sounds you hear through your hearing aids may sound different or odd, but you'll adjust to them over time. The important thing is to not give up – once you've got used to your hearing aids, they might be life-changing.

See 'What's the best way to get used to my hearing aids?', page 8.

What's the right way to fit my hearing aids?

The NHS generally provides behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids. These pass sound into your ear through either:

- an earmould that sits inside your ear (see picture A) – most BTE aids have earmoulds
- a small, soft tip (dome), which is known as an 'open ear fitting' (see picture B).

Some NHS hearing services also fit receiver-in-the-ear (RITE) or loudspeaker-in-the-ear BTEs (see picture C). These have a clear tube with a wire inside, which runs from the main part of the aid to a loudspeaker held in the ear by a soft earpiece.

The step-by-step guides on the following pages show you how to fit these different types of hearing aid correctly.



Tip: Hearing aids often have a colour-coded marker on them so that you know which ear the aid is for. This marker is always red for the right ear and blue for the left.

How to fit hearing aids with an earmould

1



Hold the earmould at the back with your finger and thumb. Pull it back past your ear.

2



Put the part that goes down the ear canal into position.

3



Then put in place the bit that fits in to the top of the 'bowl' of your ear.

4



Use your other hand to pull down your earlobe. Push the earmould in firmly.

5



Correctly fitted aid.

6



Incorrectly fitted aid: the top part of the earmould isn't tucked in to the top of the bowl of the ear.

How to fit hearing aids with an open ear fitting or receiver in the ear



- 1** Hold the hearing aid behind your ear with the soft tip facing towards your head.
- 2** Place the soft tip in your ear with the tail facing backwards. Push the tip in as far as it will comfortably go, otherwise you won't hear as well as you should.
- 3** Fold the tail backwards into the bowl of your ear. Sometimes, when it's new, the tail doesn't stay in place, but after a few days it should mould itself to the shape of your ear.
- 4** Correctly fitted aid.

What's the best way to get used to my hearing aids?

Everyone's different, but you might find this step-by-step guide useful. Just remember to go at a pace that feels right for you.

1 Slowly build up the time you spend wearing your hearing aids

– start by using them once or twice a day for about an hour or two in quiet surroundings. (But if your hearing aids feel comfortable, wear them for as long as you can!)

2 Listen to everyday noises – for example, the kettle boiling, the fridge humming and doors opening and shutting, to get used to how they sound. Remember that your brain might have adjusted to not hearing a lot of sounds and you may need time to re-learn the significance of them and to ignore unimportant ones.

3 Try conversations with one person – make sure you're in a quiet room and that the other person sits facing you in good light, so it's easier to lipread them (see page 20 for more on lipreading).

4 Try group conversations – don't expect to hear everything that's said when you're with more than one person, but try to follow the conversation.

5 Practise using your hearing aids outside – be aware that some sounds can seem very loud until you get used to them.

6 Try using your hearing aids in noisy places – these are likely to be the most difficult listening situations.

Having problems?

It's not unusual to find it hard to adjust to the sounds you hear through your hearing aids. But you should find that the more you wear your hearing aids, the easier it gets.

If, after a month or so, you still can't get used to your hearing aids, ask your audiologist if they can alter the settings to better suit your needs. Let them know if there are particular situations that you find difficult, such as meetings or when listening to music, or if particular noises sound strange or distorted – tinny, for example.

See 'Where can I get further support with my hearing aids?', page 19.

What is the hearing loop setting?

Most hearing aids will have a hearing loop setting (formerly known as the 'T' setting), but your audiologist may need to activate it before you can switch it on and off as and when you need it. They should have done this at your hearing aid fitting – ask your audiologist about it if you're unsure.


When you switch your hearing aids to the loop setting, you'll be able to pick up sound from certain types of listening equipment, such as hearing loop systems ('loops') and infrared systems. This type of equipment helps you hear more clearly over background noise as it sends sound from a sound source – for example, a microphone – directly to your hearing aids.

Loops are often found in public places such as theatres, cinemas, shops and banks, and should be clearly advertised by the sign on the right.



You can also get loop systems for your home and car. Telephones described as ‘hearing aid compatible’ have a type of built-in loop system that can give you a clearer phone conversation with less background noise.

Infrared systems are used in some venues – do ask what’s available.

 See our factsheet *Hearing loop and infrared systems for people with hearing loss* to find out more.

What other useful hearing aid settings are there?

Many digital hearing aids allow you to switch between different settings for different situations – for example, when you’re listening to music or having a conversation in a noisy place. Some types of hearing aid even adjust automatically in response to different sound environments.

Your audiologist should have explained the different settings that could help you when you had your hearing aids fitted, but if you’d like to find out more, do ask them.

What’s the best way to clean my hearing aids?

Hearing aids with earmoulds

Clean the main part of your hearing aid by wiping it carefully with a soft, dry cloth or tissue. Take care not to get it wet.

Wipe the earmould with a soft, dry cloth or tissue every night. Don’t use any chemicals as they could damage it. Use a pin or something similar to remove any wax or debris that has got into the channel that goes through the earmould.

About once a week, separate the earmould from the hearing aid and wash it. But check this with your audiologist first.

Follow the instructions below for washing the earmould:



- Gently pull the soft tubing off the hooked part of the hearing aid by holding on to the tubing with one hand, and the hook of the aid with the other, and tugging gently. Don't pull the tubing out of the earmould as you won't get it back in again.
- Wash the earmould (with its tubing still in place) in warm, soapy water. Use a nailbrush or a vent cleaner (or both) to remove any wax. Rinse it well, blow down the tubing to get the water out and leave it to dry overnight. Then push the tubing back onto the hearing aid. Make sure the curve of the earmould goes the same way as the curve of your hearing aid.



The picture on the left shows the earmould put back the wrong way round. Make sure that the curve of the earmould goes the same way as the curve of your hearing aid, as shown in the picture on the right.

Hearing aids with an open ear fitting

The step-by-step guide below shows you how to clean the tubing of your open ear fitting with a cleaning wire.

The way you take off the tubing for cleaning is a bit different from one type of open ear fitting to another. So you'll need to check the instructions you've been given.



Hearing aids that fit inside your ear



In-the-ear (ITE) or in-the-canal (ITC) hearing aids (see picture) are sometimes fitted by the NHS where BTE aids aren't suitable – for example, if the outside of your ear is damaged. Or you can choose to buy these hearing aids privately (if they're suitable). ITE aids can be seen from the side; the smallest ITC aids fit inside your ear canal.

Completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids sit further inside your ear canal, and invisible-in-the-canal (IIC) hearing aids are fitted very deeply in the ear canal. CIC and IIC aids are usually only available privately. Some IIC hearing aids stay in the ear for a few months at a time and can only be removed by an audiologist, who will maintain and clean the aid for you. You can take other models out of your ear by yourself.

To avoid damaging hearing aids that fit inside your ear, don't wash them. Wipe them with a dry tissue and use a soft, dry brush to remove wax from the opening. Don't poke anything into the opening as you may damage the earphone. Your audiologist will show you how to look after your hearing aids, and they should come with cleaning tools and instructions on changing the wax guards.

How often do I need to change the batteries?

In most cases, you'll need to change your hearing aid batteries every one to two weeks. Many hearing aids will give a warning beep when the battery is low. Make sure the audiologist who fits your hearing aids shows you how to change the battery.

Remember to switch your hearing aids off when you take them out, to save the batteries and to prevent whistling noises. And don't forget to carry spare batteries when you go out.

Where can I get new batteries?

If you have NHS hearing aids, you can get free batteries from any NHS audiology service or ear, nose and throat department that has a battery service. You might also be able to get them from your local health centre, by post, or from our **Hear to Help** service (see page 19). Ask your audiologist about local arrangements.


If you bought your hearing aids privately, batteries may be covered in your plan. If not, you'll need to buy them from a pharmacy or your hearing aid provider. They can cost between £3 and £8 for a pack of six.

What about repairs and replacements?

On average, hearing aids last three to five years. If you get your hearing aids from the NHS, repairs and replacements are free if the aids stop working properly or if you need a different type because your hearing changes. But if you lose or damage your hearing aids, you might be asked to pay something towards their repair or replacement. New earmoulds, tubing, filters and batteries are also free.

If you bought your hearing aids privately, there may be a charge for repairs and replacement tubing and filters, as well as a charge for lost or damaged hearing aids.

Some private hearing care providers in England are part of the Any Qualified Provider scheme, which means they provide NHS hearing services alongside private services. Their repair and replacement policies vary.

 For more information, see our factsheet *Everything you need to know about getting hearing aids*.

Hearing aids with earmoulds

If your earmoulds become loose or uncomfortable, ask your audiologist to take a look – they may be able to adjust them. If the problem can't be fixed, they'll make new ones. Occasionally, some people are allergic to the earmould material and may need special moulds made from non-allergenic material.

The tubing will need changing every three to six months to prevent it hardening, splitting and causing problems. Your audiologist can do this for you, or show you how to do it yourself.

Hearing aids with an open ear fitting

If, instead of earmoulds, you have small, soft tips, these will need changing regularly, too. Your audiologist will show you how to do this.

Shop for hearing loss products

We have lots of useful products to help you take care of your hearing aids. Call our Customer Services Team to find out more, or request our free *Product catalogue*, which features the latest products and technology to help with all types of hearing loss.

Order the catalogue free today!

Telephone **01733 361199**

Textphone **01733 238020**

Email **solutions@hearingloss.org.uk**

Or shop online at

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop



How to change the tubing of your hearing aids



1
Pull old tubing out



2
Cut end off new tubing at a slant...



3
...so you are left with a tapered end.



4



5
Push tapered end into earmould.



6
Thread tapered end through...



7
...until bend reaches earmould.



8
Cut close to earmould.



9
Line up with old tubing and cut...



10
...to same length.



11
Reattach hearing aid to earmould.



12
Correctly fitted tubing.

What should I check if my hearing aid isn't working properly?

If you're having problems with one, or both, of your hearing aids, your audiologist can help you. But there are some common problems that you might be able to solve yourself...

No sound or very muffled sound?

- Check that the hearing aid is switched on properly.
- If your hearing aid has a volume control, check that it's not been turned right down.
- Check that you haven't switched your hearing aid to the hearing loop setting (see page 9) by accident.
- Check that the earmould or soft tip isn't blocked with ear wax.
- If you have a hearing aid that fits inside your ear, or an RITE hearing aid, check to see if the wax filter needs changing.
- There may be moisture in the tubing. Pull the tubing gently off the hooked part of the hearing aid and shake it to remove any droplets that may have collected. If condensation continues to be a problem, ask your audiologist if you can have low-condensation tubing. Moisture can sometimes affect the hooked part of the hearing aid, too. Your audiologist can replace this.
- Check that the tubing isn't squashed or split.
- Check that the battery is the right way round. If it is, try replacing it with a new one.

If you've checked all of these things and are still having problems, you'll need to take your hearing aid(s) back to your audiologist to see if it/they need to be repaired.

Wind and weather strip

Some hearing aid models have a wind and weather strip that protects the microphone. These can sometimes get clogged, making the sounds unclear (the aid is working but seems quieter), and may need changing. Ask your audiologist if your hearing aids have this feature, as they can show you how to change the strip. If you have trouble changing it yourself, your audiologist can do it for you.

Buzzing noises?

This might mean you've switched your hearing aid to the loop setting (see page 9) by accident.

Whistling or squeaking noises when wearing BTE hearing aids?

This might mean that:

- the earmould isn't in your ear correctly – check by taking it out and pushing it gently back in
- you have excess ear wax in your ears – ask your GP to check
- the earmoulds don't fit your ears closely enough (because they are old or you have lost weight) – speak to your audiologist
- the earmoulds, hooked 'elbows' or tubing have become loose or split – if this is the problem, you'll need help from your audiologist.

Ear problems?

If you have itching, discharge from the ear or earache, see your GP. You might also find our leaflet *Ear problems and treatments* useful.

Where can I get further support with my hearing aids?

Remember, it's not uncommon to have problems when you start to wear hearing aids, but there's plenty of support available to help you overcome any issues you have.

Your audiology service

You should have had a follow-up appointment with your audiology service 8-12 weeks after you had your hearing aids fitted (or after a few weeks if you bought your hearing aids), to check how you are getting on. If you need help in between appointments, contact your audiology service. Some can even arrange home visits.

Hear to Help

If you wear NHS hearing aids and need some help with them, our free **Hear to Help** service might be just what you need. Our community support officers and volunteers might be able to help you manage and maintain your hearing aids through home visits and drop-in services.

As yet, the service doesn't cover the whole of the UK, but it's growing all the time. Contact our Information Line or visit **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/heartohelp** to find out if there's a Hear to Help service near you.

Support groups

Some people find that sharing experiences and information with others in similar situations can really help. To find a support group in your area, contact our Information Line (see back page for contact details).

You can also share experiences and get support online through:

- our website forums: **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/forums**
- our Facebook page: **www.facebook.com/actiononhearingloss**
- Twitter: **www.twitter.com/actiononhearing**

How can lipreading help?

Lipreading is an essential skill for people with hearing loss. It's the ability to recognise the lip shapes, gestures and facial movements of the person you're talking to, so that you can fill in the gaps when you can't hear everything that's being said.

Our research report *Not just lip service* highlights how lipreading classes can improve communication and help people to better manage their hearing loss. To find out if there's a class in your area, contact our Information Line (see last page) or visit the website of the Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults: **www.lipreading.org.uk**

 To find out more, see our leaflet *Learning to lipread* and read our report at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/notjustlipservice**

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Become a member today to receive regular, up-to-date information on hearing loss, deafness and tinnitus.

From as little as £12.50 a year, you'll receive:

- **Our quarterly magazine** packed with expert tips, product reviews, inspiring real-life stories and research news.
- **A comprehensive guide** to deafness and tinnitus.
- **10% introductory discount*** on products to help with hearing loss.
- The opportunity to **influence our future direction** by voting in Trustee elections.



Join today:

- Call **020 7296 8264** (telephone) or **020 7296 8246** (textphone).
- Join online at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/join**

* Applies to products from our catalogue and online shop. Minimum spend is £40 excluding postage and packaging and VAT. Action on Hearing Loss reserves the right to change the promotion at any time.

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Title	Date of birth
Name	Tel*
Address	Textphone*
	Email*
Postcode	

* By providing my details I confirm that I am happy to receive email and SMS communications from Action on Hearing Loss about their vital work

2. Please select payment option

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- ☐ Payment by credit/debit card or cheque – please send me an application form.

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- ☐ 15th

of the next available month

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Instruction to your bank or building society <small>Please pay Action on Hearing Loss Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Action on Hearing Loss and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.</small>		
Signature(s)		
Date		

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Action on Hearing Loss values your support and promises to respect your privacy. The data we gather and hold is managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). We would like to keep you informed about our vital work and how you can help. If you do not want to receive this information, please let us know by emailing supportercare@hearingloss.org.uk or by writing to us at: Supporter Care, Action on Hearing Loss, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL



Where can I get further information?

We produce a wide range of free information covering hearing loss, deafness, tinnitus and related issues such as ear problems, hearing aids, communication support, benefits, rights, equipment and deaf awareness. Our leaflets are a good place to start as they cover the basics, while our factsheets go into more detail.

You can find our publications on our website at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets** or order free copies from our Information Line (see last page for details). Our friendly, fully trained Information Line Officers will also answer any queries you have.

You can find lots of other useful information online at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk**

Alternative formats

If you'd like any of our leaflets or factsheets in Braille, large print or audio format, please contact our Information Line.

Information you can trust

We are certified by The Information Standard as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. For a list of references for this leaflet, please email **references@hearingloss.org.uk**

Can you help us improve our information?

We'd love to hear what you think of this leaflet – please email **reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk** And do let us know if you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create new publications and improve existing ones.

We're Action on Hearing Loss, the charity working for a world where hearing loss doesn't limit or label people, where tinnitus is silenced – and where people value and look after their hearing. We can't do this without your help.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk**

Action on Hearing Loss Information Line

Telephone **0808 808 0123**

Textphone **0808 808 9000**

SMS **0780 000 0360**

(standard text message rates apply)

Email **information@hearingloss.org.uk**



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