



Your Journey to

BETTER HEARING

A guide to living a healthy hearing life



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THE MOST

FULFILLING JOURNEYS

START WITH A GOAL

Like most journeys, the journey to better hearing usually begins with the desire to accomplish a goal. In this case, the goal is to finally do something about your hearing loss and stop letting it impact your quality of life.

We say “finally” because unlike eyesight, which people address by getting glasses as soon as it fades – hearing loss tends to be ignored or put off for as long as possible.

The reasons for delay in seeking treatment are as varied as the people who experience hearing loss:

- **The onset of hearing loss is usually gradual** – Making it easier to ignore or go unnoticed.
- **It's not always recognized for what it is** – Instead, it's other people talking too softly or mumbling.
- **It's viewed as inconsequential** – “So what if I can't hear as well? It's not hurting anyone but me.”
- **It's relatively easy to work around** – You can just turn the TV up louder or avoid places where it's more of a problem.
- **There's a concern about how hearing aids look and what others will think** – “My hearing isn't bad enough for hearing aids.”

Once people fully understand the dynamics of hearing loss, the determination to take this fulfilling journey can begin. So let's start there.

FACT:

On average, people wait seven years between first noticing their hearing loss and finally taking action.

Understanding Hearing Loss

LET'S START WITH

SOME FACTS:

One in five Americans ages 12 and older experiences hearing loss severe enough to hinder communication.

Nearly **50% of adults** ages 75 and older have hearing impairments.

Hearing loss is the **third most prevalent** chronic condition in older Americans after hypertension and arthritis.

Men are more likely than women to experience hearing loss.

About **26 million Americans** between the ages of 20 and 69 have high frequency hearing loss due to exposure to loud noises at work or in leisure activities.

Tinnitus affects up to **50 million Americans**.

Tinnitus is currently the **#1 service-connected disability** for veterans from all periods of service.

(NIDCD, 2013; Li-Korotky, 2012; ATA, 2013; WHO, 2013)

If you have hearing loss, you're not alone. In fact, the World Health Organization estimates that 360 million people worldwide have "disabling hearing loss."

Understanding Hearing Loss

HOW

HEARING LOSS OCCURS

To understand why hearing loss is so pervasive, it's important to first understand how hearing loss happens.

Hearing loss happens when any part of our delicate hearing system stops working properly, whether it's due to damage or deterioration. The most susceptible and common parts to break down are the microscopic [stereocilia](#), the thousands of tiny hair cells that detect and send sound in pulses to the brain.

When these tiny hair cells become injured, diseased or die naturally, the result is [sensory hearing loss](#). This is by far the most common type of hearing loss.

HOW HEARING LOSS CAN IMPACT YOUR LIFE

If you think hearing loss is inconsequential, you should know that studies have linked untreated hearing loss to significant issues such as:

- Diminished psychological and overall health
- Impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks
- Reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety
- Avoidance or withdrawal from social situations
- Social rejection and loneliness
- Fatigue, tension, stress and depression
- Irritability, negativism and anger
- Reduced job performance and earning power

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Understanding Hearing Loss

WHAT

HEARING LOSS IS LIKE

You can't recreate a typical hearing loss simply by plugging your ears. A person with normal hearing can hear quiet, medium and loud sounds that vary from low pitch to high pitch with amazing clarity and definition.

But when you have hearing loss, you often lose the ability to hear higher pitched sounds, like the sound of a mosquito near your ear, women's and children's voices, or consonants like T, S and F. Even though you still may be able to hear strong vowel sounds such as A, E and I, speech becomes harder to comprehend.

THIS SHOWS SPEECH SOUNDS TO PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS

Recent research has shown that exposure to loud sound can damage nerve pathways yet leave sensitivity to very soft sounds intact (Kujawa & Liberman, 2009). The result is that speech and music at the levels we like to listen can be distorted, making understanding very difficult. This is why "I hear, but cannot understand," is a common complaint.

Choose Better Hearing

HELP IS AVAILABLE

If you think you or someone you know has hearing loss, the next step is an easy one – confirm it by seeing a hearing healthcare professional.

Whether you consult with an audiologist, an ENT doctor or a hearing aid specialist, it's important to see someone who specializes in hearing issues. Seeing a hearing specialist will ensure you will receive a comprehensive evaluation and precise measurement of your hearing loss.

WHY SEE A HEARING PROFESSIONAL?

Just as every person is unique, every hearing loss and hearing need is unique, too. That's why it's always recommended that you consult with a hearing healthcare professional.

They are trained experts who have the experience and state-of-the-art equipment needed to inspect your ear canal, accurately measure your hearing loss, assess your unique needs, and prescribe a solution that takes all this important and personalized information into account. You can also count on them to provide all necessary support and ongoing care.

TIP:

The Better Hearing Institute recommends
purchasing hearing aids from hearing healthcare
professionals only.

Choose Better Hearing



WHAT TO EXPECT

AT YOUR FIRST APPOINTMENT

You took the most difficult step toward improving your hearing when you took the first one —recognizing you need to find out more about your hearing loss and improving your situation. Everything after that is easy, including your initial hearing consultation. Most appointments consist of at least these three steps:

1 HEARING ANALYSIS

After answering questions to establish your general health and hearing history, you will undergo a thorough hearing examination. First, both ears will be visually examined to see if there are any obstructions in the ear canal that might be affecting your hearing.

Then, you'll be tested with the latest standard-of-care methods and technology to precisely determine the degree and type of hearing loss you have. This quick and painless test consists of listening and reacting to pure tones in a sound treated booth.

Your results will be illustrated in a detailed **audiogram** that your hearing healthcare professional will review with you.

2 LIFESTYLE DISCUSSION

Next will be a lifestyle assessment. Expect to be asked a lot of questions about the things you like to do and the places you like to go. This is an important step —as your answers help ensure that any solution prescribed is customized specifically for your needs.

Take Action

HEARING AIDS

ARE A SMART SOLUTION

Today, more than ever, the best solution for many individuals with hearing loss is hearing aids. Like all high-tech devices, hearing aids have improved significantly over the past several years in terms of performance and appearance.

This includes “invisible” solutions that fit deep inside your ear and are virtually undetectable when worn, or wireless options that stream audio directly from your TV, radio and phone. Regardless, today’s hearing aids sound better, fit more comfortably and perform more reliably than ever before.

BE INFORMED

If your hearing healthcare professional recommends hearing aids, you’ll want to be ready with questions. So let’s review what you should know about hearing aids.

HOW HEARING AIDS HELP

Have you heard negative comments about hearing aids? That’s because the basic premise of hearing aids is to amplify sound. And until the late ‘90s, that’s literally all they did – make everything louder. Today’s hearing aids are designed to do so much more to keep you comfortable and in touch with the world around you.

Take Action

NEW FEATURES

HAVE COMPLETELY CHANGED HOW HEARING AIDS PERFORM

Today's hearing aids still amplify sounds, but thanks to digital and technological advances, they're much smarter and more selective in what they amplify. Like phones that now do a lot more than just let you talk to people, hearing aids can do a lot more than just make sounds easier to hear.

HELP WITH HEARING IN NOISE

One of the biggest challenges people with hearing loss have is hearing in noisy places like restaurants or at social gatherings. It's not that they can't hear, it's that they can't hear clearly. It's all one muddled mass of sound — and the voices of the people they're with don't stand out.

The best of today's hearing aids remedy those challenges with **directional microphones** and **noise reduction technology**. Programmed specifically to your hearing, they're designed to help you focus on speech from a certain direction. Noise reduction makes listening more comfortable, allowing you to focus on who or what you want to hear.



Take Action

HEARING AID

STYLES

Hearing aids come in a wide range of styles. Your hearing healthcare professional will recommend one or more types based on factors such as your level of hearing loss, aesthetic preferences, lifestyle needs and budget. Most Behind-The-Ear and Receiver-in-Canal styles come in a range of colors and metallic finishes to complement your hair or skin tone.

Invisible-In-The-Canals (IICs)



This custom-fit style is inserted farther into the ear canal than other styles, making it virtually undetectable to others. IIC hearing aids are designed to be removed daily to promote good ear health.

Completely-In-Canal Hearing Aids (CICs)



CIC hearing instruments are custom-made to fit completely in the ear canal. Only the tip of a small plastic "handle" shows outside the canal, which is used to insert and remove the instrument.

In-The-Canal Hearing Aids (ITCs)



Custom earmold that fits securely in the ear canal. A smaller portion shows in the outer ear. The ITC style offers easy insertion and removal.

THE QUESTION

EVERYONE ASKS

One of the first things first-time hearing aid buyers want to know is “How much is a pair going to cost?” The short answer is, “Anywhere from \$6,000 to \$500.” The right answer is, “It depends on what you need.” In other words – people have different hearing needs, not all hearing aids are alike, and not all service packages are the same.

When considered along with other quality-of-life items that you pay for monthly (for instance, cell phones, cable TV or even coffee), the financial investment is very comparable and definitely worth it.

Remember, too, that hearing aids are highly sophisticated medical devices fit by educated and trained professionals, and typically include additional benefits and services like follow-up visits, repairs and counseling.

THERE’S A RANGE FOR A REASON

Like many things you buy—from televisions to cell phones to glasses—there is a wide range of pricing that applies to hearing aids. They’re available in a variety of styles, with a range of high-tech features, which means you’ll typically pay less for big and basic than you will for hearing aids that are little and loaded.

Features discussed earlier that cancel noise, eliminate feedback, improve high-frequency audibility and enable direct connectivity to phones, TVs and music greatly improve performance and enhance everyday listening, but also increase costs. Unfortunately, most insurance programs don’t cover the cost of hearing aids. For details on pricing and financing options, talk to your hearing healthcare professional.



THE RIGHT FIT

Today's best hearing aids are precision instruments, utilizing advanced technology that can and should be customized to fit your specific hearing loss and your unique lifestyle needs. Determining which hearing aids are right for you depends on a variety of important and unique factors, including:

- The nature and severity of your hearing loss
- Your eyesight and dexterity
- The size and shape of your outer and inner ear
- The types of activities you enjoy
- Cosmetic concerns

That's why getting fit with the advice and consultation of an experienced hearing healthcare professional can't be overemphasized.

Time, Practice & Experience

HELP

ENSURE SUCCESS

In a short while, wearing your new hearing aids will be second nature, and you'll wonder why you didn't get them sooner.

However, it's important to know that complete satisfaction won't happen overnight.

Unlike eyeglasses, which, when put on, give you immediate results, hearing aids typically require a short transition period. You'll need to get used to how they sound, how they feel, and get in the routine of wearing them every day. It will take practice, time and patience to fully realize all the benefits these powerful "mini computers" can have on your life.



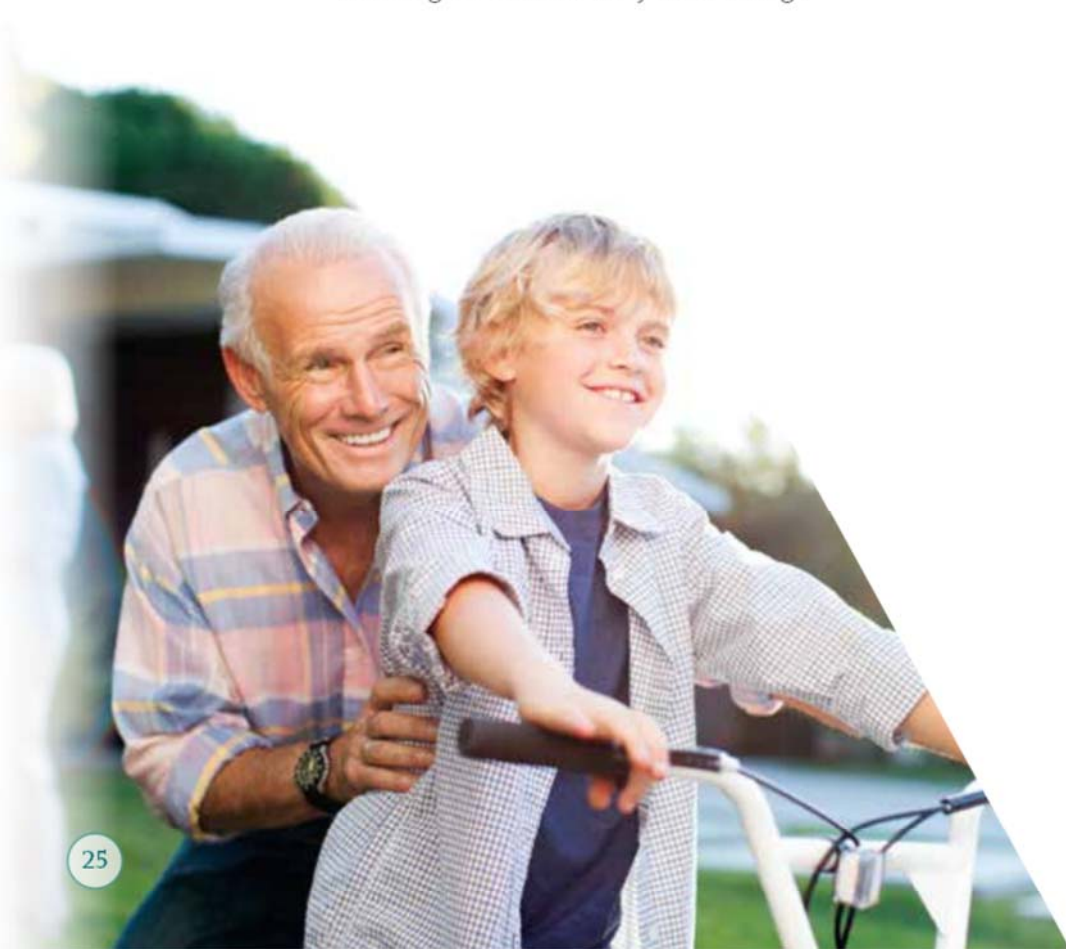
Time, Practice & Experience

HEAR BETTER FASTER

One discipline common to almost everyone who successfully makes the transition to hearing aids is **practice**. It is an investment that will require time.

Your hearing professional has access to resources specifically designed to make practice productive and fun – including personalized websites filled with clinically proven hearing skills training exercises and interactive games that you can do at home.

Once you have logged the sufficient number of hours for your brain to re-acclimate to ambient sounds, you will be able to go on with your life without thinking so much about your hearing.



Time, Practice & Experience

ASSIGNMENTS

Week One

- ☐ If necessary, choose a quiet environment to begin using your hearing aids. You might not want to wear your new hearing aids in crowded or noisy environments until you have adjusted to them in your own home.
- ☐ Listen carefully to the many forgotten sounds in your home, like the refrigerator, furnace, or the sound of turning the pages of a book or magazine. You will get used to hearing them again.
- ☐ Practice having a conversation with your spouse or loved one. Make sure your television and radio are turned off. Facing each other, sit no more than seven feet apart. Practice looking at the speaker's mouth. Remember, much of communication is visual.
- ☐ Practice reading out loud. You will slowly adjust to the loudness of your speech while wearing your hearing aids. It is normal at first for your voice to sound different. Don't worry, soon it will sound familiar again.
- ☐ Practice listening to the different speech patterns of different people. The goal is to find a comfortable volume level for listening, not to try and understand everything that is being said. Hearing and understanding improves with time.
- ☐ If you become fatigued, take a break. Put your hearing aids back on a couple of hours later.
- ☐ Practice getting used to your new hearing aids a little every day. Be patient. Do not wear your hearing aids all day long during this period. Your progress will depend on your commitment to hearing better.

Time, Practice & Experience

W eek **THRee**

- ☐# If you haven't already, wear your hearing aids in louder, more crowded places and for longer periods of time. Wear them to work, worship, parties, meetings, sporting events and restaurants. These are difficult environments, so you will need to be patient and begin learning some skills to improve your listening situation.
- ☐# In listening environments with background noise, concentrate on the speaker. Over time, your brain will subconsciously categorize sounds and will tune out background noise and focus on the speaker.
- ☐# Call your hearing healthcare professional with any questions you have during this process. They understand the difficulties you face dealing with your hearing journey, and are there to help.
- ☐# And remember, there will be situations where it's difficult to hear even for normal hearing individuals.

Take care of your hearing aids (and they'll take care of you)

Like any state-of-the-art device or high-tech instrument, your hearing aids need to be well cared for to work their best. Follow the care and cleaning instructions given to you at your fitting, and your hearing aids should provide years and years of performance and comfort.

YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY

There's no doubt hearing aids are a significant investment in terms of time and money. But what you're about to get in return has the potential to be priceless:

- Feeling more safe and secure
- Feeling less isolated
- Being more engaged with family and friends
- Enjoying music and TV to the fullest
- Feeling more aware and confident
- Communicating easier
- Feeling less reliant on others
- Improving your overall quality of life

Enjoy your new hearing aids. You are well on your way to better hearing!

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