

Are hearing aids my only option?

No. Hearing aids can be very helpful but here are some other options that can help you hear better.

1. Assistive devices for phones (some are free for persons with hearing loss) and in theaters or other locations.
2. Personal amplifying devices like a pocket talker. You carry them with you.
3. Assistive devices for TVs. You get higher volume without bothering others.
4. Change where you sit in restaurants or other settings. To minimize background noise, go at quieter times and sit with your back to the wall.
5. Directly face others when talking.
6. To help protect your hearing, wear ear protectors when around loud noise.

What are the first steps?

If you are having trouble hearing, get a good hearing evaluation. Speak with your health care provider who can check for ear wax and refer you to a hearing specialist. The specialist can test to see what type of hearing loss you have and if a hearing aid or other option would help you hear better.

You can also get information from local and national hearing associations. Some are listed on the next page.

Peer support from others with hearing loss may be helpful. To find out if a local chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America is available in your area go to its website listed on the next page or call.

Summary Notes and Tips

Hearing Loss

- Is common as we age
- Results in distorted sounds
- Decreases enjoyment in life and interactions with others

First Steps

- Don't wait to seek help
- Get more information from groups like those listed below
- Speak with your health care provider

When Seeing a Hearing Specialist

- It takes time to adapt to a hearing aid
- Specialists should tailor fit the aid to your hearing loss
- Cost often includes fine tuning the aid
- There are options besides a hearing aid to help you hear better

Where to Get More Information

Hearing Loss Association of America

www.hearingloss.org

Voice: 301-657-2248

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing

Talk with a health information specialist at
Voice: 800-241-1044 TTY: 800-241-1055

Better Hearing Institute

www.betterhearing.org

Consumer help line toll free
800 EAR-WELL (800-327-9355)

National Council on Aging

www.ncoa.org/hearingloss

202-479-1200

Hearing



Helps Us

Stay Connected to Others

Stay Safe

Stay Engaged with Life



*Some facts about hearing loss,
why it is so important,
and what to expect
when you visit a hearing specialist*

Developed by the Hearing Screening & Education Project, University of California, San Francisco©2013 & Funded by NIDCD

What is age related hearing loss?

- As we get older our hearing usually becomes less sensitive because some of the special cells in our inner ear no longer respond to sounds.
- We may have a hard time hearing certain sounds, especially high frequency or high pitch sounds, like birds or whispers.
- Consonants, like S, T, or P, are high frequency sounds that help us understand differences between words, like “sing” and “thing.”
- Vowels (A, E, I, O, U) are lower frequency and so are easier to hear.

Why do I still feel I hear but often do not understand what is said?

Age-related hearing loss usually comes on so slowly that we are not aware of what we are not hearing. When we do not hear high frequency sounds clearly but still hear low frequency sounds we may think that other people are not speaking clearly or are mumbling. We may not realize that our hearing is the problem. We may misinterpret what people say – like thinking “time” is “dime” – and even respond incorrectly without knowing we did.

- John: “*Did you see that sign?*”
- Mark: “*Thanks, I feel fine*”

When other people shout it doesn't help much because the consonants are still not clear. Hearing loss is not like wearing ear plugs. It is not just less loudness; we hear distorted sounds.

Isn't hearing loss just my problem if I'm okay with what I hear?

Hearing loss affects communication with everyone around us. Family and friends have to repeat what they said and may stop talking if they think they will not be heard.

“I'd like to share something with Mark, but it just loses its meaning when I have to repeat it 3 times”

When we have hearing loss, listening takes more effort so we may withdraw from activities we enjoy because it's just too tiring. We may miss the sounds of nature, music, performances, and other things we once enjoyed and so become isolated.



Why are hearing aids so expensive?

The cost of a hearing aid often includes the service of the professional doing the test as well as follow-up appointments. But you don't necessarily need the most expensive aid. What you get should depend on the type of hearing loss you have and where you want to hear most clearly. Aids are not covered by most health insurance plans, but some like the VA and Medi-Cal may include them. Organizations and local groups like Lions and Rotary Clubs may help with resources.

I heard hearing aids don't work.

Hearing aids are aids. They:

- Can't repair the cells that no longer respond to sounds
- Can't return your hearing to what it was when you were younger
- Can usually help you hear better with less effort and so do more of the things you like to do
- Can include features like telecoils to help you hear better in auditoriums and other enclosed spaces

They work best when you realize:

- They are not like glasses. It takes time to relearn how to hear
- You usually need several visits to fine tune the aid to match your needs

“I didn't realize how much a loss I had until I wore the hearing aids and then took them out. What a difference!”

Does hearing loss affect safety?

Yes. Warning signals like smoke alarms are often high frequency sounds and become harder to hear. We may also miss hearing an oncoming car.

Can't I wait until it gets worse?

Any decision to get hearing aids involves discussion with your hearing specialist. But even mild hearing loss can affect how we understand words, and adapting to a hearing aid is easier when begun sooner than later. Early treatment may help us understand speech better and keep the parts of our brain that receive sound active. Much like “use it or lose it.”