

The **5** Steps to **Better Hearing** WITH HEARING AIDS



Your guide to increased understanding, independence and happiness through the use of hearing aids

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"Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger."

— Franklin P. Jones

Step One – Admit that I have a permanent hearing loss

1 By now you have had your hearing professionally tested and have been told the fact that you could benefit from the use of hearing aids. You now have two choices:

(1) Denial or (2) acceptance. It is normal for most people to go through a period of denial. However, most people wait five to seven years before addressing their hearing loss. Such a typical thought process may be:

- "I hear fine, it's just that people mumble; they don't speak clearly anymore."
- "It's the noisy places where I have trouble hearing...I'll just avoid those places and I'll be OK."
- "My hearing will heal in time."



2 Trying to hide or compensate for your hearing loss can be more obvious than wearing a pair of hearing aids. Your associates, clients, friends and loved ones already know you have hearing loss. You can push the fact out of your mind, but you are only fooling yourself. You can decide to try and conceal your problem, but the symptoms have already given your secret away.

- Answering the wrong questions.
- Confusing similar words, like “bathroom” and “vacuum,” “dime” and “time,” “peach” and “teach.”
- Turning up the TV too loud for normal listeners.

3 The first step to overcoming your communication problem is admitting to yourself and your nearest loved one(s)...

- That you have an irreversible hearing loss.
- That your hearing problem is affecting the quality of your life.
- That medication will not ‘open up’ your ears.

“More people spend more time and energy going around their problems than trying to solve them.”

— Henry Ford



“Positive anything is better than negative nothing.”

— Elbert Hubbard



Step Two – Make a personal commitment to seek better hearing

1 It is not only the purchase of a product which will give you better hearing. Only about 20 percent of your success to achieve better hearing will depend on the performance of the hearing aid products you purchased.

2 The fundamental requirement to overcome your hearing problem is your deep, driving desire to learn and a vigorous determination to increase your ability to hear. The six characteristics present in all persons who complete the transition to hearing aids are:

- Positive attitude
- Willingness to learn
- Relentless commitment
- Time spent practicing the use of hearing aids
- Patience while your brain acclimates to ambient sounds and noises

3 Hearing aids will not bring you instant gratification. They are not like eyeglasses – which result in clear vision by simply putting them on. Hearing aids are more like skates: buying a good pair of them is only the starting place. A good coach who knows how to teach skating is the second step. Time spent in practice, with a patient and willing attitude by the student, is the third and most important step.

4 To achieve better hearing, you must work at it daily. The ability to hear again has to be relearned—not just purchased. The most successful hearing aid users will gladly tell you that their effort to learn, with their time spent practicing, was the price they paid for better hearing.

5 The decision to have a good attitude about going through the process to improve your hearing must be yours, not that of your spouse, son or daughter. As a hearing professional, we cannot make this commitment for you; it is your choice alone. Abe Lincoln once remarked that “most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” As you embark on the process of better hearing, a cheerful attitude will not only affect your success, but will be an encouragement to everyone you know.

“If you still can’t hear your friend speak from across the table at the restaurant on family night, be encouraged — a normal hearing person will have trouble under these circumstances too.”

— Thomas Jones

Step Three – Learn all I can about hearing loss

1 The most effective remedy for hearing loss is personal education. You need to learn all you can about your particular loss. To begin, you will need to know:

- What is the type of hearing loss I have?
- What is the degree of loss in my left and right ears?
- How has my brain been affected?
- How do hearing aids bridge the gap?
- What can I do to improve my hearing?



2 What type of hearing loss do I have? Your hearing professional will identify the type of hearing loss you have. It will probably be one of the following three types:

- **Conductive hearing loss:** Sound isn't conducted properly from the outer or middle ear to the inner ear.
- **Sensorineural hearing loss:** The inner ear is unable to properly transmit sound to the brain. The hair cells inside the inner ear (especially those for high-frequency hearing) have withered due to age, noise or medications, and no longer pick up sounds properly.
- **Mixed loss:** This is a combination of a conductive loss and a sensorineural loss.

3 The following are recommended Web resources for educational information on hearing loss:

- www.Hearing-Aid.com
- www.betterhearing.org (Better Hearing Institute)
- www.audiology.org (American Academy of Audiology)



“Learning is an active process. We learn by doing. So, if you desire to master the principles you are studying...do something about them. Apply them at every opportunity.”

— Dale Carnegie

4 When you first begin using hearing aids, your brain will be startled to receive signals it has been missing. Until it becomes acclimated to these sounds, you will think to yourself...

- Everyone's voices sound odd to me.
- My own voice bothers me. It sounds like I am speaking into a barrel.
- The hearing aids are noisy. Unless I go into a quiet room, they pick up all sorts of distracting noises.
- Will this condition improve with time?

5 Because you haven't heard normal sounds and noises for a long time, wearing hearing aids will be like moving into a new house. At first, the sounds amplified by your hearing aids will sound tinny, metallic, artificial and unnatural. But, this is because you are hearing the high-frequency speech sounds (like "s," "f," "k," etc.) you have been missing, or have heard differently for years. This unnatural sound quality will actually improve your speech comprehension – but only if you stick with your new hearing aids until your brain has a chance to adjust. With practice and time, your brain will adjust. Hearing and understanding involve more than the hearing organ. Your hearing is a complex function which requires the cooperation of the brain and your other senses.

“Personally I’m always ready to learn, although I do not always like to be taught.”

— Winston Churchill

6 Understanding occurs in your brain, not in your ears. Re-acclimating your brain to true sound is a little like priming a pump; you’ve got to stay with it long enough for the water to flow. Once it is flowing – and it will flow – the hardest part is over.

- From early childhood the sounds of words and noises are conveyed to the brain to gather visual images of things. This information is stored in memory compartments which are your “sound vocabulary.” When you lose part of your hearing, the corresponding part of your brain – which now has no input from your ear – volunteers that brain part for another assignment.
- After a time of not hearing, the brain will need a period of time to become familiarized with the high-frequency sounds of speech and environmental sounds. This is the hardest time for a person who begins using hearing aids. When you begin using hearing aids, your brain will make little use of the new sound information for five to six weeks, then gradually it will start to use it.
- The ability to make instant association depends on repeatedly hearing a word. If you do not hear a word for a long period of time, difficulty connecting the sound to its meaning occurs.

7 “Auditory Confusion” is caused by the flood of authentic sounds, noises and voices which suddenly break into your consciousness after not being heard for years. These are sounds which will again become a part of your subconscious once your brain hears them on a daily basis through hearing aids. For example:

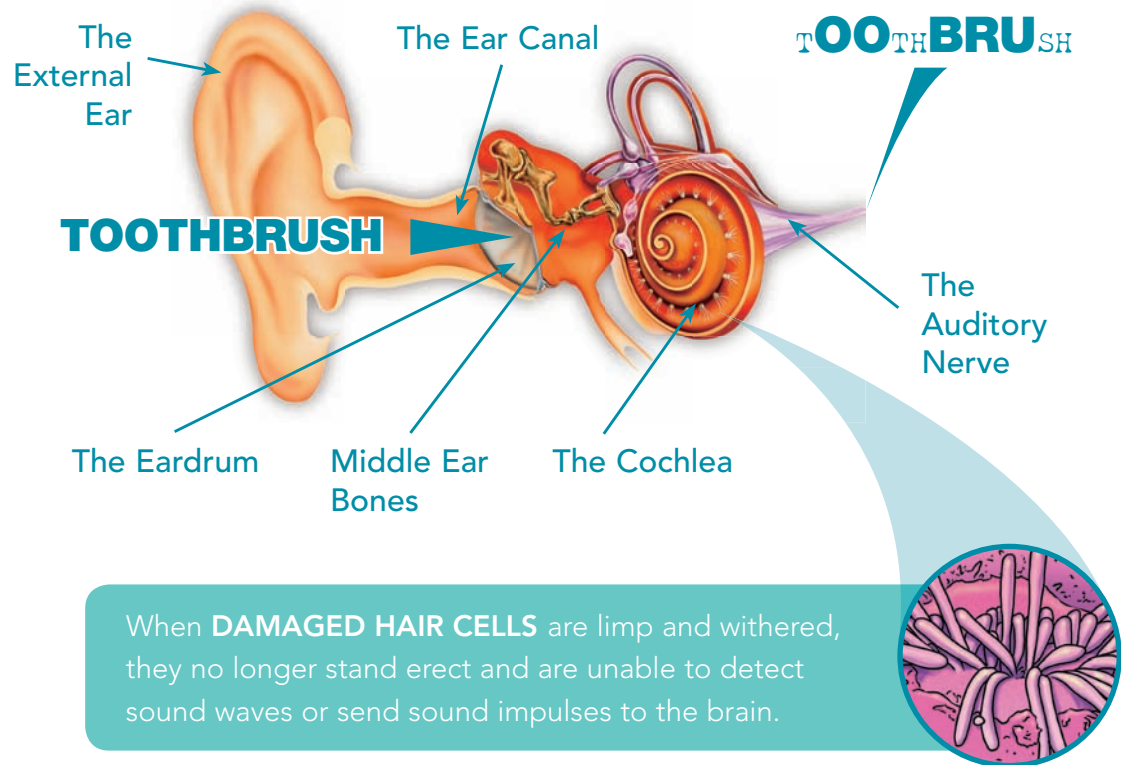
- The true pitch of your telephone ring
- The sound of your clothes rustling as you walk
- The woosh of your air conditioning vent or “hum” of your refrigerator motor



Sensorineural Hearing Loss Causing Auditory Confusion

TOOTHBRUSH?

When the microscopic stereocilia (hair cells) in your cochlea are damaged, they will not send complete signals to your brain, causing you to be unable to understand the consonants within words. For example, the word "TOOTHBRUSH" may sound like "OO--BRU."



When **DAMAGED HAIR CELLS** are limp and withered, they no longer stand erect and are unable to detect sound waves or send sound impulses to the brain.



HEALTHY HAIR CELLS stand erect, and are able to accurately detect sound waves and send sound impulses to the brain.

"If you set your mind on goals, your mind will figure out a way to get them.."

– Jack Foster

Step Four – Set realistic expectations

- 1** Focus on your improvement, not on those times when your hearing aids did not perform to optimize hearing. They will help you hear much better, but they are not perfect.
- 2** If you purchase a custom molded hearing instrument, designed to fit your ear, you will likely need to have some adjustments to make it a better fit.
- 3** The "tinny" or mechanical sounds you hear are normal. These are the soft, high-frequency sounds you have been missing. Your hearing aids are giving these sounds back to you. This may be bothersome at first, but better understanding comes from letting you hear them. Be patient while your brain gets reacquainted with these sounds.
- 4** Some wearers say, in the beginning, it sounds as if they are talking from inside a barrel. In time, their voices begin to sound natural.

5 Background noise is normal. Normal-hearing people hear it too. Don't give up on hearing aids because noise bothers you. Better hearing will require you to put up with a few inconveniences.

6 Buying hearing aids won't provide instant gratification. There is a learning curve which usually takes from six weeks to six months. Success comes from practice and commitment to wearing your hearing aids all your waking hours. Stick with it. You will succeed.

7 Should your hearing aids ever stop working, do not be alarmed. This is normal. The inner ear canal is 100 percent humidity and remains a constant 98 degrees. Earwax is a combination of salt and corrosive body acid. These conditions are harmful to electronics. But it is in this environment that hearing aids must perform. You will need to bring them in for routine professional care.



"By prevailing over all obstacles and distractions, one may unfailingly arrive at his chosen goal or destination."

- Christopher Columbus

Step Five – Know that the keys to success are practice, time and patience

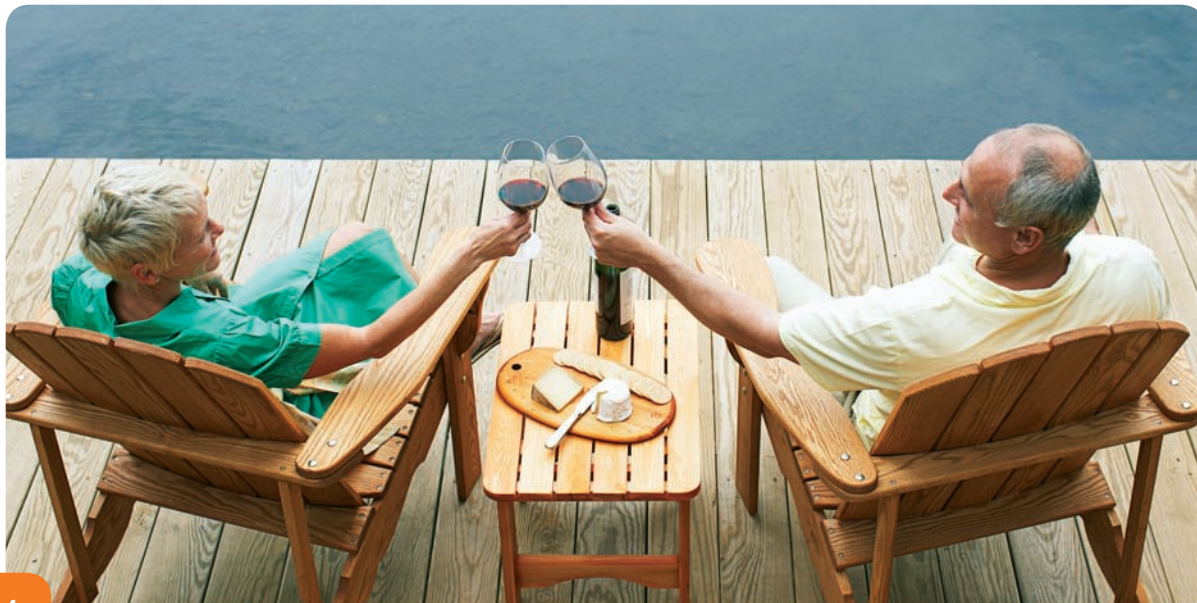
1 There is a common discipline followed by all men and women who successfully make the transition to hearing aids. It is called practice. It is an investment that will cost you time and patience. It is an investment that usually begins to pay dividends within 45 days. Once you have logged the sufficient 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.

2 While we encourage new users to start at a slow pace at home, your ultimate goal should be to use your hearing aids all day, every day. This includes times when it is quiet, times when it is noisy and times when you may think you don't need to be wearing them. Unless your hearing aids become part of your habit through daily use, your brain will not be stimulated long enough to learn to interpret the true sounds of your world.

3 After you have completed your initial week to two weeks of gradual hearing aid use, you should put your hearing aids on first thing when you wake up and take them out at bedtime. It is a mistake to only wear them when you go out to social functions because your brain will be flooded and startled by unfamiliar ambient sounds.

4 Be patient and don't give up. Retreat temporarily if you become tired, but don't quit. Keep working – it will become easy. Call us whenever you need help or encouragement.

5 Stay in contact with your hearing professional with any concerns you have about excessive loudness or perceived lack of benefit. On average, new hearing aid users should come back three or four times during the first 30 days for adjustments, progress checks and support in learning to overcome difficult listening situations.



Getting Started With Your Hearing Aids: Assumptions, Assignments and Success!

Some noises you may have forgotten:

- Dishes clattering when stacked in the cupboard
- Paper feeding through the printer
- Computer beeping with a new email
- Pans clanging against each other
- Pop of the cork being removed
- Water running makes a lot of noise
- Chopping vegetables with a knife
- Hum of the refrigerator
- Chirping of birds outside



Assignment 1: Practice in easy listening situations

- 1** Choose a quiet environment to begin using your hearing aids. Do not wear your new hearing aids in crowded or noisy environments until you have adjusted to them in your own home.
- 2** Listen carefully to the many forgotten sounds in your home. Walk from room to room. Identify the noises made by your refrigerator, air conditioner, computer and clocks. Practice getting used to the sounds of stacking dishes and crackling and popping of the newspaper as you turn the pages. These sounds are a natural part of your environment. You will get used to hearing them again.

- 3** 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 20 percent of communication is visual.
- 4** Listen to the sound of your voice. 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.
- 5** 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. This is like a tourist visiting a different area of the country where the language is the same, but the accent or dialect is different. A Westerner will speak somewhat differently from a Southerner or New Englander. However, after listening to the dialect over a period of time, the listener will become familiar with the local speech patterns.
- 6** If hearing environmental sounds causes you discomfort, or if you become fatigued or uncomfortable, take a break. Put your hearing aids back on a couple of hours later. Similar to getting used to contact lenses, a gradual period of adjustment is normal for everyone who first uses hearing aids.
- 7** 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 hear better.

Assignment 2: Practice in difficult listening situations

- 1** Begin wearing your hearing aids in small groups and out of your home into more difficult hearing environments. Before attempting this level, you should be wearing your hearing aids at least four hours a day in your home and have reached a level of confidence listening to individual speakers.
- 2** Practice increasing the space between you and the speaker. Do not adjust the volume of your hearing aids. As distance increases it becomes more difficult to hear. With practice, you will learn techniques for hearing and understanding at your benefit level.
- 3** Participate in conversations with two other people at a time in quiet surroundings. Don't worry if you can't understand both of them, try focusing on one at a time. Remember, even a normal-hearing person has trouble understanding when several people are talking at the same time.
- 4** As you embark on more difficult listening environments, it is OK to occasionally say, "I didn't catch what you said." Practice looking at the speaker's face. Your brain will begin to relearn the sounds you have been missing. Sounds will seem odd at first. With practice, they will become familiar.
- 5** Gradually increase the time you spend wearing your hearing aids by wearing them in your car, at the grocery store, and when you run errands. Trace the new sounds you hear to their source. By learning to wear your hearing aids in your daily routine, your brain will soon "tune out" the normal noises you initially will find irritating. As you get used to wearing your hearing aids, you'll soon be able to wear them all day and will no longer feel the need to adjust their volumes.

"Patience and fortitude conquer all things."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

- 6** Begin listening to the news on television. Ask your spouse or a friend with normal hearing to set your television's volume. Focus your attention on the person speaking. Ask others in the room not to talk during the program. Focus on the total story, not on specific words.
- 7** Listening to the television is more difficult than listening to a speaker in the same room. Practicing watching television will make other difficult listening situations easier.
- 8** Wear your hearing aids for extended periods of time. Don't overdo it. If you become fatigued, take them out for a while, but always put them back in. Do not give up. Like learning a sport or playing a musical instrument – to become proficient will require daily practice.



Assignment 3: Practice in very difficult listening situations

- 1** Begin wearing your hearing aids in public places. Wear them to work, church, 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.
- 2** Begin increasing the distance between you and the speaker. In listening environments with background noise, practice focusing on one speaker's voice and watching their facial expressions and lip movements. You will hear other noises, but concentrate on the speaker. Over time, your brain will subconsciously categorize sounds and will tune out background noise and focus on the speaker.
- 3** If necessary, turn your head slightly toward the speaker. Don't feel self conscious. While noticeable to you, these movements will go unnoticed by those around you.
- 4** Better hearing will depend on (a) your commitment to make your hearing aids work in your everyday routine, (b) time spent wearing your hearing aids to become comfortable using them in different environments, (c) your patience while your brain adjusts to unfamiliar sounds.
- 5** Call us with any questions you have during this process. We understand the difficulties you face dealing with your hearing problem. We are here to help.

Remember, the job of your hearing aid is to change your brain's listening level – and that just takes Practice, Time and Patience.



**National Council
for Better Hearing**

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