

## May 2021 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Overcoming Obstacles to Wearing Hearing Aids

Hearing loss, a common problem caused by noise, aging, disease, and heredity, occurs in approximately one in three people between the ages of 65 and 74 and nearly half of those older than 75. Those with loss may find it hard to have conversations with friends and family, difficulty understanding a doctor's advice, responding to warnings, and hearing doorbells and alarms. Hearing loss can lead to social isolation. There are many causes of age-related hearing loss. Most commonly, it arises from changes in the inner ear as we age, but it can result from changes in the middle ear, or from complex changes along the nerve pathways from the ear to the brain. Certain medical conditions and medications may also play a role.

**Question: why do people hesitate or resist to wearing hearing aid devices? Why is it that people become discouraged and stop using them? Adjusting to hearing aids is not the same as adjusting to wearing eyeglasses!** With glasses, a person is fitted by the optician after having a prescription from an ophthalmologist filled. Seldom does one need to return to the optician. **BUT** for hearing aids, there is a difference. The difference is that hearing aids are not "perfect" the first time. According to Dr. Rieko Darling (WWU Dept. of Communication Sciences and Disorders), "it is more than the "goods" or the technology that has the potential to be of great benefit. It is the relationship that the person with the hearing loss has with the provider of that technology. Each person's hearing loss is different, as is their reaction to the hearing loss, personality, lifestyle, cognitive resources, how they handle difficulties, as well as a myriad of other variables. The audiologist who sees the whole person and takes the time to work with each person is necessary. As is the willingness of the person with the hearing loss to work with the audiologist, to have realistic expectations, and to give the technology a 'fair chance' to work."

Researchers at University of Alberta suggest the following reasons why it is very easy to get turned off to the idea of wearing hearing aids. Some people expect to have hearing restored to what it was. But the hearing system has been damaged. Expectations are often too high, and "when those expectations aren't met, people become disenfranchised, stop using them and tell everyone else it doesn't work." Hearing aids are not designed to restore lost function. The delicate hair cells in the ear have been damaged by noise, age or medications and cannot just be repaired. Hearing devices use tiny directional microphones and a lot of advanced processing to help minimize distracting background noise. In other words, aids maximize one's ability to hear who is talking to you.

Being proactive about wearing hearing aids means if one person in the family has a hearing loss, everyone needs to adjust and be more forgiving. It is all right to ask people not to talk when they are out of the room or while they are running water or while the radio is on. It is all right to ask to have the music turned down in a restaurant. Audiologists suggest that the new user do the following: **Take time to get it right! Keep an open mind! Be persistent to adjusting to new technology! Realize that it is a slow process that has to be worked through. Spend as much time as needed with an audiologist. Counselling, support and time are needed when one begins using hearing aids.**

The National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders simple self-assessment quiz: Answer "yes" to three or more of these questions, you could have a hearing problem and may need to have your hearing checked. Questions: Do you sometimes feel embarrassed when you meet new people because you struggle to hear? Do you feel frustrated when talking to members of your family because you have difficulty hearing them? Do you have difficulty hearing or understanding co-workers, clients, or customers? Do you feel restricted or limited by a hearing problem? Do you have difficulty hearing when visiting friends, relatives, or neighbors? Do you have trouble hearing in the movies or in the theater? Does a hearing problem cause you to argue with family members? Do you have trouble hearing the TV or radio at levels that are loud enough for others? Do you feel that any difficulty with your hearing limits your personal or social life? Do you have trouble hearing family or friends when you are together in a restaurant?

Suggested sources: <https://www.bloomhearing.com.au/en-au/blog/why-people-dont-wear-hearing-aids>  
<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/age-related-hearing-loss>

<https://www.doctorsofhearinghealthcare.com/people-reject-using-hearing-aids/>

<https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/hearing-loss/why-people-avoid-hearing-aids-and-how-to-help>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/hearing-loss-common-problem-older-adults>