

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

Setting Reasonable Expectations about Hearing Aid Wear

How much should my child wear his hearing aids at first?

- During the first few days of use, put the hearing aids on your child 3-4 times a day for 15 - 30 minutes each time.
 - If meals are one of your child's favorite times, put the hearing aids on as you feed him.
 - During other periods of hearing aid use, play with favorite toys, look at books, or sing nursery rhymes.
 - Your child will be distracted by these activities from the feeling of something new in his ears. He will be hearing your voice at the same time.
- Each day, increase the length of each period of use until the periods blend together and the child is wearing the aids full time during his waking hours. Your child should not wear his aids while he is sleeping.
- Talk with your audiologist and early intervention specialist to **set a date** by which your child will be using hearing aids full time.
 - One rule of thumb is: Full-time use during the child's waking hours **within three weeks of the initial fitting.**
 - *The sooner you establish full-time use of hearing aids, the sooner the child will be able to rely on hearing as a way of getting information.*
 - You can establish a schedule: First thing in the morning (or after a nap) we get you dressed, put your hearing aids on and have some breakfast (snack).

**"If your baby wears hearing aids only four hours each day,
it will take six years to give him as much listening experience
as a normally hearing infant accumulates in one year."**

(Stovall, D. [1982]. *Teaching Speech to Hearing Impaired Infants and Children*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.)

What should I expect to see in the way of his response to sounds?

Your child's age at the time hearing aids are first placed, the degree of his/her hearing loss, and the amount of amplification provided are all factors which will affect how your child responds to sounds when he first begins wearing hearing aids. Ask your specialist and audiologist how they think your child might respond to sounds.

Here are some descriptions of behaviors you may see.

When you first put hearing aids on, some young children become very still as they hear voices for the first time. They do not know what voice is or what it means, but if they see their parents smiling at them and moving their mouths as this sound is occurring, they may be reassured that they are safe! Some children begin crying as the hearing aids are placed, so the first sound they hear is their own cry (though they don't know that's what it is). Some children are startled by this noise and stop crying to listen!

**As you put the hearing aids on your child at home,
you may see one or more of the following responses.**

- A baby up to the age of 5 - 6 months may startle to sounds or show surprise when a sound occurs by widening his eyes, starting to cry, stilling, ceasing crying or movement.
- A child older than six months may look up when a sound occurs, then may look around. He has no idea what made the sound or what it means, but it is an unusual event for him if he is hearing for the first time. Be sure you show the child what is making the sound and repeat the sound. It is very important that the child start learning that sounds mean something or he may stop responding to them.
- A child with a profound hearing loss may receive sound at very soft levels. He may not give much indication that he is hearing, since he has not yet learned to listen for these
- soft sounds. Talk in normal tones within 6-12 inches of this child's hearing aids about things he is doing or seeing. Use lots of intonation in your voice; play with animals and vocalize the sounds they make. Use the gesture of pointing to your ear and then to his ear to indicate that, yes, he is hearing something, however faint.

What if he cries or pulls the hearing aids out?

- Working through the child's resistance to having the hearing aids put on takes courage! *You must be convinced that the benefits the child will get from wearing hearing aids will outweigh the child's discomfort in adjusting to something new.* Your child does not yet know that the hearing aids will bring him sound. Talk and laugh with your child as you put the aids on - surely this can't be all bad if Mom is smiling and joking!
- The caregiver must be the one who makes the decisions about when the child's hearing aids are removed. When the child takes an aid off, calmly replace it and distract him with a toy or game. If it is close to the time when you would be removing his aids, play with him for at least five minutes before doing so, then tell him, "Time to take your hearing aids off."
- Remove the hearing aids without a lot of fanfare. Do not associate removal of the aids with expressions of relief or happiness.

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- A normally hearing baby listens for about 10 hours a day, 365 days a year. That adds up to 3,650 listening hours per year!
 - A normally hearing toddler or preschooler listens about 12 hours per day 365 days per year. That adds up to 4,380 listening hours per year.
 - If a toddler or preschooler only wears amplification only at preschool (about 2.75 hours a day) it would take 9 years for the child to have as much listening experience as a hearing preschooler or a preschooler with hearing loss that wears amplification all waking hours (12 hours).

**The day your child begins wearing hearing aids
is the day you start helping him overcome
some of the challenges created by hearing impairment.**

FULL-TIME VS. PART-TIME HEARING

We occasionally hear of someone who uses their hearing aids or their cochlear implant "only when they have to" or "only when they want to," such as when they are with a group of people in a noisy place where hearing is difficult, or only when they want to watch TV or a movie. But the people who are most comfortable and who receive the most benefit from their hearing aids or cochlear implant are the ones who use them full-time (all the time that they are awake). That's why we encourage you to use your hearing aids or cochlear implant - and your hearing - full-time, even in easy listening situations and even when you are alone.

Why use your hearing aids or cochlear implant even in places where you can get along without them?

Hearing is something like exercise --the more you use it, the better shape it's in. That's because your ears --and your brain --become used to a certain "sound world." If someone with a hearing loss does not use their hearing aids or their cochlear implant, their ears - and their brain --become used to a less stimulating sound world. Their ears aren't being "exercised" regularly by all the speech, music and noise around them.

Full-time hearing

If someone uses their hearing aids or their cochlear implant full time, their ears and brain become used to hearing more of the sounds in their environment. They become more comfortable with those sounds and they can become better at understanding the different sounds. Once that adjustment is made (and it can take several weeks or months), this becomes their new sound world.

Part-time hearing

But what if they only use their hearing aids or their cochlear implant when they go out, or when they watch television, perhaps for only 4 hours a day. While using their hearing aids or cochlear implant they might hear 90% of the sound environment. But the rest of the time when they are not using their assistive devices, they might hear only 50% or less of the sounds in their environment. Which environment do their ears and brain adjust to? (Answer: Neither)

In other words, your ears become used to a certain sound world. Sometimes that world is quiet; sometimes it's noisy. Sometimes you're in an easy hearing situation, and sometimes hearing is difficult. If you use your hearing aids or cochlear implant only when you have to, or only when you "want to," both your sound world and your hearing are always changing -and you probably won't be fully comfortable, or receive the most benefit from your hearing aids or cochlear implant. So, keep your hearing in good shape! Let your ears develop the habit of better hearing by using your hearing aids or cochlear implant full time.

*From "Sound Advice" the newsletter of the House Ear Clinic,
Los Angeles, Spring, 2001, where the cochlear implant was invented.*