



HEARING AIDS

What, Why, When, How?

What are hearing aids?

Hearing aids are like mini-computers that are worn on the ears that make sounds louder and shape the sounds so that they fit each individual's hearing loss. The goal of hearing aids is to make all of the sounds of speech audible, at least when the talker is close to the listener and it is quiet. This can usually be accomplished as most children who have his loss have useable hearing. Some children have so much hearing loss that no hearing aid will allow them to hear all of the sounds of speech. Hearing aids don't restore normal hearing like glasses can restore normal vision. Almost all children who wear hearing aids will still have more problems than people without hearing loss understanding speech clearly from a distance, in noise or when spoken quickly.

Why does my child need to wear hearing aids?

Children learn as they experience the world. Children start acquiring the building blocks of speech and language as soon as they are born. Hearing loss limits how much spoken language a child will experience or be exposed to. This is likely to cause delays in speech, language, listening, learning and behavior if help is not provided right away. The single most important thing we can do to help young children with hearing loss develop spoken language like other children is to help them to hear their best with hearing aids.

When does my child with permanent hearing loss need to start wearing hearing aids?

If your child has a permanent hearing loss in one or both ears, he needs to start to wear hearing aids as soon as the loss is identified. The brain develops pathways to understand the meaning of sounds as it receives input. Hearing loss limits input. Unless the hearing loss is addressed fewer pathways will form limiting future ability to understand spoken language. By getting hearing aids for your child as early as possible you are taking a very important step to preventing lifelong learning delays.

How much does my child need to use hearing aids every day?

Babies listen and experience their world for about a year before they say their first words. If your goal is to have your child have the best listening and verbal language skills possible by the time he starts school, then hearing aids must be worn all waking hours from the time he is very young. If your baby or child wears hearing aids only four hours each day, it will take six years to give him as much listening experience as a young child with normal hearing accumulates in one year. The number of hours per day your child is able to listen and catch language effectively will strongly affect his verbal language and learning readiness by school age.

Although children with normal hearing seem to learn speech and language effortlessly, it is really a very complex process. Every child is 'wired' to learn the language that is used around them. It may help to think about a young child with a talent for ice skating. How can he get to the Olympics? First, he must

wear ice skates. But just having the skates will not develop skating skills; he must wear the skates and practice many hours each week. He also needs to have a coach who can skate to show him the skills and shape his learning. Ultimately may get to the Olympics because of many little successes that make him feel like he can compete with other skaters. A skater without much practice on skates or coaching will be unlikely to succeed in competition. A skater and a child with hearing loss are different – a skater is only on skates a number of hours each week to practice and learn new skills. A child with hearing loss needs to wear hearing aids all waking hours to learn the complexities of spoken language. While wearing hearing aids the child with hearing loss needs to interact and have conversations with people to practice his listening and develop his language skills. He will benefit from coaching by professionals who work with him and your family so that he can get the most out of language learning experiences. Success in the early school years (before reading) is based largely on the ability to listen and understand what the teacher is saying. If your child is to compete with other children his age in school, he needs to have years of listening and language practice! For a child who is learning spoken language the hearing aids need to become a part of who he is as they are the main contributor to why he is successful, even though he has a hearing loss and how he learns all day, every day.

How do I get my child to wear hearing aids?

First, it usually takes time for your child to get used to the hearing aids. Your child's audiologist will probably talk to you about how to introduce your child to listening with hearing aids and slowly increase the amount of time they are worn. The goal is to have him wear the aids all of his waking hours within three weeks after you first get the aids. During the first 2-4 days you should put the hearing aids on the child several times a day for 15-30 minutes. It is best to choose times when you are busy eating, reading a book together or doing a favorite activity. This will help distract him from the feel of the hearing aids in his ears. If what he is hearing is meaningful and enjoyable he will be likely to wear the hearing aids longer. This wear schedule is increased until he wears hearing aids all of the time. It is much easier to attain full time wear with a young infant than with a busy toddler. The exception to full time wear would be when the child is bathing, as water is often harmful to the hearing aids. Very young babies can sleep with hearing aids but they are a choking hazard to children who have the motor skills to pull them out of their ears. It is very important to make it clear to your child that you are the one who takes off and puts on the hearing aids. Just as babies go through stages of resisting wearing shoes, hats or clothes, it is not unusual for a toddler to go through a period when he resists wearing his hearing aids. Firm and loving patience for a few weeks usually works to help a child through this stage. Support and information from other parents who have been through establishing hearing aid wear with their own children is often very helpful. By the time the child is about 4 he can be expected to develop independence with putting on the hearing aids with a parent's guidance. You will need to check the hearing aids daily to make sure they are working. Your audiologist will need to evaluate your child often during the first year to make sure that his or her hearing is not changing and that the hearing aids are amplifying appropriately as the child grows.

Resources and Information

- What should I expect? Setting Reasonable Expectations about Hearing Aid wear



Setting Reasonable
Expectations About H

- Website by parents of children with hearing loss; section on hearing aid use
 - <http://www.listen-up.org/haid/aids-out.htm>
- Hearing aid choices – general information
 - <http://www.babyhearing.org/HearingAmplification/AidChoices/index.asp>
- Hearing Aids for Children – American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
 - http://www.asha.org/public/hearing/treatment/child_aids.htm
- Hearing Aids – American Academy of Audiology
 - <http://www.howsyourhearing.org/hearingaids.html>
- Your Guide to Your Child’s Hearing - Better Hearing Institute
 - http://www.betterhearing.org/pdfs/e-Guides/Guide_to_Your_Childs_Hearing.pdf
- Your Guide to Financial Assistance for Hearing Aids - Better Hearing Institute
 - <http://www.betterhearing.org/pdfs/e-Guides/YourGuideBuyingHearingAids.pdf>
- What Parents Should Know About Hearing Loss: Pointers for Parents - League for the Hard of Hearing
 - http://www.audiologyonline.com/articles/article_detail.asp?article_id=361