Hearing Aids

Helen Keller was once asked if she had her choice, which she would prefer, to see or to hear. She said she would want to hear; that being deaf made her feel more cut off from people than her loss of sight.

But when one has a hearing deficit, a clean, properly maintained hearing aid can make a significant difference in a person’s life.

Types of Hearing Aids

- Non-programmable conventional or analog hearing aids, which cost about $700-$1,500 per ear.
- Programmable analog hearing aids are custom-made to each individual by a healthcare professional at a cost of $1,100-$2,000 per ear.
- Programmable digital hearing aids change sound to a digital signal, allowing the aid to be custom fit to each person’s needs. The cost is $2,100-$2,700 per ear.

(Hearing aids are not usually covered by Medicare or commercial insurance.)

Hearing Aid Styles

- Behind-the-ear aids have two parts. The part that goes behind the ear, which is attached by a piece of plastic tubing to an ear mold, which is placed in the ear canal. This type is used for all age ranges and is for all types of hearing loss.
- An in-the-ear (ITE) aid has a custom made shell that’s made from a mold of the person’s inner and outer ear. It is used for mild to moderate hearing loss and is not good for young children.
- An in-the-canal aid is like the ITE but it’s smaller and fits farther into the ear canal. It is also not good for young children and is for mild-to-moderate hearing loss.
- Completely in-the-canal is another one-piece aid, which has a custom-made shell; it’s good for mild-to-moderate hearing loss, but it’s not good for young children.
- A body hearing aid, which is not often used now, can fit in a pocket and is connected with wires to the ear mold. These are used for the most severe hearing loss and can also be used by children.

Caring for the Aid

Protection and storage — Hearing aids can stop working or not work right if they get banged up or are touched by electricity, if they are kept where it’s too hot or too cold or near water. When they are not in use, they should be kept in a safe place, such as in a box inside a drawer.

- Keep ear molds and tubing clean — A hearing aid professional should show you how to clean the ear mold and the tubing to keep from damaging it.
- Batteries — It is important to place batteries in the aid the right way. Keep a month’s supply of batteries on hand and don’t store them in the refrigerator, due to the cold temperature and the humidity. Batteries should be taken out of the aid at night, and kept in the box with the aid.

Troubleshooting

- Problems with your hearing aid? Try these:
  - Make sure the aid is turned on
  - Make sure earwax is not clogging the aid
  - Check that the battery is in the right way
  - Make sure the battery is charged
  - Make sure the paper flap is taken away from the battery
  - Check tubing for cracks, wear or wetness
  - Clean battery contacts.

- A whistling sound in the aid is usually caused by an ear mold problem. Take the aid out and place a finger over the hole. If the whistling stops, talk to a hearing professional for a fit adjustment. A volume adjustment may be needed.

Alternatives to Hearing Aids

There are other devices that may help you to hear. These include:

- Personal listening systems such as FM systems or personal amplifiers
- TV listening systems
- Direct audio input hearing aids that can be plugged into TVs and stereos
- Telephone amplifying devices
- Mobile phone amplifying devices
- Auditorium-type assistive listening systems in movie theaters, churches, etc.
- Cochlear implants
- Learn lip reading and speech reading

Resources

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Web site:
www.agbell.org

Hearing Loss Web: www.hearinglossweb.com/Technology/HearingAids/hearing_aids.htm
National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders Web site: www.nidcd.nih.gov

Information compiled by Denise Laurion Gray, MAS, BSN, RN, CCM, and Peggy Scott, BSN, RN, CCM, InHome Management Services Inc., Waldorf, MD.

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