

Choosing Hearing Aids that are **Right for You**

Making the decision to try hearing aids may take some time. An average person will wait seven years from first noticing hearing loss before doing anything about it. Many barriers exist which prevent people from purchasing hearing aids. A common myth is that hearing aids don't work. We all know someone whose hearing aids are just sitting in a drawer. No one wants to waste their money. Which brings us to the next barrier — cost. Hearing aid costs range in from \$1,000 – \$3,700 each. Who wants to spend all that money on something they feel will make them look old? We would rather spend our money on anti-aging products! These barriers should not prevent someone with hearing loss from getting hearing aids. Hearing aids not only improve hearing but they can significantly improve quality of life and prevent an individual from becoming socially isolated. Recent research has suggested that untreated hearing loss can be a contributing factor in the risk of dementia. “If you don't use it you lose it”.

Hearing Aid technology has vastly improved over the past decade. Now all hearing aids are digital and therefore adjusted on a computer to fit your exact hearing loss. The circuitry is able to adjust based on the level and type of sound coming in. This can help emphasize the sounds being listened to, over background noise for better hearing in group settings. Also, most hearing aids have directional microphones that can focus on the sound in front of the individual while reducing the sound from behind. With the advances in wireless technology, hearing aids can even receive signals from blue tooth devices such as cell phones or iPods. Simple remote controls are also available for many hearing aids to increase flexibility and ease of use. No hearing aid can restore hearing or completely eliminate background noise but, as with most technologies, recent advancements have been profound and today's hearing aids really do make a difference. As an example, we recently had a client who reported his old hearing aids simply sat in the drawer. At his follow-up appointment he reported “Now I wear my new hearing aids from Peel Audiology and Hearing Aid Services all the time. Not only am I hearing better at home, I'm hearing better

in social settings and my family is happier!” His final comment goes to show us that a hearing loss not only affects the quality of life of the individual but it can have a significant negative impact on their family and social relationships.

Hearing aids come in many different styles. There are hearing aids that can be completely hidden in the ear canal, fit in the bottom of the concha or fill the entire concha. Other hearing aids fit behind the ear either with traditional earmolds or the new more discreet model where the speaker unit is hidden in the ear canal and the microphone and amplifier are housed in a miniature casing behind the ear. The style of hearing aid that is right for an individual will depend upon a combination of degree of hearing loss, the size of the ear and the features that will provide the best hearing.

Remember, a hearing aid is always less visible than your hearing loss.

Hearing aid costs can prevent some people from trying out hearing aids. In Ontario a grant of \$500 per hearing aid is available through the Assistive Devices Program (some restrictions apply to those who have had hearing aids previously). In addition some employer medical insurance plans will cover part of the cost of hearing aids. Coverage may also be available for some through DVA, WSIB or MCSS. Finally, whatever cost is not covered can be deducted on the medical portion of your income taxes. When hearing aids are purchased there is always a minimum 90 day trial period within which the devices can be returned for refund if they are not satisfactory.

The most important factor in achieving hearing success is seeking out a qualified Audiologist. Audiologists have a minimum education of a master's degree and are the only regulated hearing health care professionals. This means they belong to a provincially regulated college that dictates how they are allowed to practice, in order to protect the public. An Audiologist

is trained to provide patient-centered care involving thorough patient assessment, comprehensive diagnostic tests, unbiased treatment options and post fitting counselling. It's their job to help you hear better and not just to sell hearing aids. Beware that some hearing aid clinics are owned by hearing aid manufacturers where hearing aid choices are limited. Make sure you see an independent audiologist who will work with you in finding the best solution for your personal hearing loss. Sergei Kochkin, a leading researcher in hearing aid satisfaction, has found that the most important factor in determining customer satisfaction from hearing aids is seeing a hearing health care professional who uses best practices in the fitting and rehabilitation with hearing aids.

So what are you waiting for? If you or someone you know is having hearing problems schedule a hearing aid demonstration. You have nothing to lose and a whole new world of sounds waits you.

Article By: Lynne Burdett M.A. Reg CASLPO and Janet Michaud M.Sc. Reg CASLPO Audiologists at Peel Audiology and Hearing Aid Services.

