

# Your Guide To Wearing Hearing Aids



Allina Health



# Your Guide to Wearing Hearing Aids

*First edition*

**Developed by Allina Health.**

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For specific information about your health condition, please contact your health care provider.





# Table of Contents

Your Hearing Aid Information .....	5
How to be a Successful Hearing Aid User .....	6
Getting Used to Hearing Aids .....	11
How Moisture Affects Hearing Aids.....	12
Dehumidifier Kit .....	13
Frequently Asked Questions About Dehumidifier Kits .....	14
Recommended Follow-up Visits .....	16
Frequently Asked Questions about Hearing Aid Batteries .....	17
Earwax: What You Need To Know .....	18
How to Fix Possible Problems with Your Hearing Aids .....	20
Assistive Listening Devices .....	21
Speechreading .....	22
Hearing Aids and Cell Phones .....	24
How Untreated Hearing Loss Can Affect Your Life .....	26
Resources .....	27



# Your Hearing Aid Information

## Type of Hearing Aid

- Behind-the-ear
- In-the-ear
- In-the-canal
- Completely-in-the-canal
- Receiver-in-the-ear
- Open-fit behind-the-ear

## Hearing Aid Manufacturer

- Widex®
- Oticon®
- Phonak®
- Unitron™
- ReSound®
- Siemens®
- Starkey®

## Model

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### Ear

- right ear
- left ear
- both ears

### Serial numbers

Right \_\_\_\_\_ Left \_\_\_\_\_

### Battery size

- 10
- 312
- 13
- 675

### Warranty

Repair warranty expires on \_\_\_\_\_

Loss and damage warranty expires on \_\_\_\_\_

### Options

- directional microphone
- automatic adaptive directional microphone
- feedback system
- noise suppression
- telecoil
- audibility extender
- automatic phone/telecoil
- Bluetooth® adjustment
- automatic switching between settings for quiet and noise
- volume control
- manual program button
- low battery indicator
- replaceable wind screen
- wax guard system
- wind noise suppression
- speech enhancer
- sound recover

# How to Be a Successful Hearing Aid User

## Be patient and open to change

To be successful with hearing aids you need to recognize you have a hearing problem and be open to change. Getting used to wearing hearing aids will take time. It is important to be patient.

Your brain must learn to recognize the voices and sounds around you because they will sound different. Your ears must get used to having something in the ear canal.

You need to give yourself time to learn and get used to your hearing aids. Start each day with a positive attitude. If you get frustrated with your hearing aids, give yourself a break and try them again later. Don't give up.

## Ask questions

Your audiologist will ask you to come back for follow-up visits during your 45-day trial period. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Talk with your audiologist if you have any questions or concerns about:

- sound quality
- cleaning or caring for your hearing aids
- something that doesn't feel right.

As you get used to your hearing aids, adjustments will need to be made to improve your hearing aids.

It is very important to go to your follow-up visits after you get your hearing aids. This will make sure your hearing aids fit right and your questions and concerns are answered.



## Know what to expect

- Hearing aids can:
  - improve your ability to hear certain sounds
  - make sounds louder.
- Hearing aids cannot:
  - give you back normal hearing
  - correct the damage that has happened to your ear from your hearing loss.
- Making speech louder may or may not help make it easier to understand.
- You will always hear better in a place that is quiet, instead of one with a lot of background noise.
- Your voice will sound louder or different when you wear your hearing aids.
- Your brain will pay attention to every sound you hear at first because it's new. This includes speech, music and environmental sounds, such as footsteps on a floor, the refrigerator running or a clock ticking. Over time, your brain will figure out which sounds are important. The more you wear your hearing aids, the faster this will happen.
- You may or may not be able to wear your hearing aids all day when you first get them. If you are having trouble with hearing too much, try using your hearing aids 1 or 2 hours at a time and then take a break. Do this two or three times each day to help your ears and brain adjust to the hearing aids slowly. As the days go by, slowly increase the amount of time you wear your hearing aids until you can wear them all day comfortably.
- You may have some trouble putting in and taking out your hearing aids. This is normal. You will need to learn how to do this by “feel” since you won't be able to see what you are doing. After you put your hearing aids in, you can look in the mirror to see if you got them in right. Keep practicing and you will get better.
- The first week you wear your hearing aids will be the hardest. The second week should be easier.

Talk with your audiologist about what you can expect from having hearing aids.

## Communication tips

Here are some tips that can help you communicate well with people.

- If you don't know what someone said ask them to repeat the information.
- If you are not sure what was said, repeat what you heard. The person can then repeat the information if needed.
- Try to sit somewhere that has good lighting and not a lot of background noise. At restaurants, sit in booths or tables near a wall instead of in the middle of the restaurant. Try to go to restaurants before or after the busy times, if possible.
- Pay attention to the person talking. It will take more energy to listen to someone talking when you have hearing loss. Paying attention to the person talking will help make sure you don't miss any information.
- Visual cues are very important, especially when in a noisy situation. Try to sit or stand in spot where you can face the person or people talking.
- Before going somewhere, try to think about the situation you will be in. How many people will you be with? Will you be sitting around a table or in rows? Will there be background noise? Try to get there early so you can sit where you feel you will hear the best.
- Educate those around you. Let people know it is important for them to talk to you while they are facing you. It is important that they not cover their mouth with anything while talking to you. Let people know how to best speak to you so you can understand the first or second time.
- If you keep missing a word or two, ask the person to rephrase the sentence or write the word down.
- Speechreading can be very helpful. Read more on pages 22 to 23.
- Talk to your family and friends about how your hearing aids will help improve your hearing. It is important for them to understand that hearing aids will not make your hearing perfect.

## Communication tips for family and friends

Here are some tips that can help family and friends communicate well with a person who has hearing loss.

- Get their attention before you start to speak. This will help reduce repeating what you said and any frustration.
- Try to reduce background noise before you start to speak, if possible. For example, ask them to mute the television.
- Try to speak clearly and at a pace that is not too fast or too slow. Use very brief pauses between sentences. This will help them process what you are saying.
- If you are going to suddenly change the subject let them know. It can be hard for them to know when the subject has changed, especially when in a group or a noisy place.
- Try not to yell or shout. There is a difference between hearing and understanding. Most people with hearing loss can hear you, but have trouble understanding what you say. If you need to repeat the information, try to reduce background noise, face the person and repeat what you said. If they need it repeated again, try to rephrase it or ask them what they heard. They may have missed one or two words.
- Try to avoid noisy places. When going to a restaurant, try to go before or after the busy times, if possible.
- Facial expressions and gestures are very helpful. Try not to cover your mouth with your hand or another object. Don't chew or smoke while talking. These types of things can make it harder for them to understand you. You will then likely have to repeat what you said.
- Try to be patient. Situations that become frustrating for you will be just as frustrating for the other person. Remember, hearing aids do not make hearing perfect.
- Ask them to give you ways that you can help them hear and/or understand what you are saying easier.

## Trouble understanding speech in noisy environments

There are a variety of reasons why you may have trouble understanding speech in noisy environments – even with your hearing aids.

- Your brain has lost or is losing its ability to understand speech. During a hearing test you are asked to repeat words that you hear people say. The fewer the words you understand, the more trouble you will have understanding speech. This means that with your hearing aids you may be able to tell that people are talking, but not understand what they are saying. Hearing aids cannot give you back normal hearing.
- You have never worn hearing aids before. When you have hearing loss, you lose your ability to tune out background sounds. When you start wearing hearing aids, you will begin to hear sounds you haven't heard in awhile. Your brain will need to learn how to tune out these sounds again.
- You have older hearing aids. As technology improves, so will the features in hearing aids. Newer hearing aids will mean better control of background noises. It will also help you hear speech better too.

### Tip

Ask your audiologist about a program called LACE™ (Listening and Communication Enhancement). This program can help you re-train your brain to understand speech better in noisy environments when wearing your hearing aids.

### Tip

Read more about assistive listening devices on page 21.

### Here are some tips on how you can understand speech better in noisy environments.

- At a restaurant, ask for a booth or table that is next to a wall or in a corner. Try to sit in a seat facing a wall.
- At a place of worship, try sitting in a variety of places until you find one that helps you hear the best. Sit close to a speaker if there is a sound system. Ask if assistive listening devices are available. Try not to sit under a balcony. The sound will get softer and make it harder for you to hear.
- At a theater, ask if there are assistive listening devices available to use. Try sitting in different locations each time you go until you find an area that seems to work the best. Try not to sit under a balcony. The sound will get softer and make it harder for you to hear.

**Remember:** Hearing aids help your ears pick-up the sound so your brain can understand better. If your hearing aids do not seem to be enough, there are other assistive listening devices that you can use with your hearing aids. Ask your audiologist to help you find a device that is right for you and your hearing loss.

# Getting Used to Hearing Aids

It will take some time to get used to wearing hearing aids. You will need to get used to how they feel and how they sound.

## How they feel

It will take some time for your hearing aids to feel comfortable. When you first start to wear them, you will be very aware of them. Over time, you will not even notice that you are wearing them.

If your hearing aids hurt your ears, they may need to be adjusted or you may not be getting them in right. You should be able to wear them from morning to night without any pain.

## Tips for Taking Care of Your Hearing Aids

- Make sure your hands are clean and dry when handling your hearing aids.
- Clean your hearing aids often. Use a clean, dry tissue or microfiber cloth to wipe away any debris.
- If your hearing aid is broken, don't fix it yourself. Ask your audiologist to look at it and see if it can be fixed.
- If your hearing aid gets damaged, don't throw it away. Bring it to your audiologist to see if it can be repaired.

Your hearing aids should stay in place after you put them in. It's a good idea to check in the mirror after you put them in to make sure they are in the right place. If your hearing aids slip out during the day, they are too loose.

Tell your audiologist if you have any problems with how your hearing aids fit. They may need to be sent to the manufacturer to be remade.

## How they sound

There are sounds that you have not heard for awhile because of your hearing loss. Your hearing aids will help fix this by making these sounds louder. It will take some time for you to get used to the increase in sounds that you are hearing.

It takes time to get used to these sounds because:

- Most sounds are louder than what you are used to. The more hearing loss you have, the bigger difference you will have with your hearing aids. Your audiologist may gradually increase the volume over several months to help make the transition easier.
- Your brain calls your attention to any new sound. This will help you not miss something important. When you start wearing hearing aids, there are many new sounds. Some are important such as music or speech. Many are just background or environmental sounds such as your footsteps on the floor or the refrigerator. The more you wear your hearing aids, the faster your brain will get used to the new sounds.

- Your brain filters out the sounds that you do not care about. This part of the brain allows a person to live next door to an airport or a train station. A sound that was very loud and noticeable in the beginning becomes a sound that is rarely noticed. When you start wearing your hearing aids, your brain isn't filtering sound so you hear a lot of background sounds you used to filter. Your brain will start filtering these sounds again.

When you come in for your recheck appointment after the hearing aid fitting, your audiologist will check how well you are adjusting to your hearing aids. Your audiologist may recommend a different type of hearing aid if you do not seem to be adjusting to your hearing aids.

## How Moisture Affects Hearing Aids

Can you answer "yes" to any of these questions?

- Do you sweat a lot?
- Do you like to be outside during the summer?
- Have you noticed your hearing aids working off and on (intermittently) from time-to-time?
- If you wear behind-the-ear hearing aids, have you noticed the tubing becoming stiff, discolored, or what looks to be water inside?
- Have you noticed a reddish or rusty color on the inside of the battery door?
- Have you gotten caught in the rain or gotten in the shower with your hearing aids on?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may have moisture problems with your hearing aids.

### Important

Do not store your hearing aids in the bathroom or kitchen. These rooms have the most moisture.

Moisture includes:

- sweat (perspiration)
- condensation (going from cold to hot or hot to cold temperatures)
- humidity.

Too much moisture can cause hearing aids to work intermittently, become weak, drain the battery or not work at all.

Moisture can also cause bacteria to build up on your hearing aids. This may cause a foul odor or an infection in the ear canal.

## Did You Know?

A tubing blower is used with behind-the-ear hearing aids to keep the inside of the tube dry.

## How to keep your hearing aids dry

- When you turn your hearing aids off at night, make sure the battery door is open all the way.
- Take your hearing aids out if you are:
  - exercising
  - working outside on a hot day
  - going outside when it is raining.

Do not put them back in until you are someplace dry.

- The next time you see your audiologist, ask about a dehumidifier kit or a tubing blower. These tools will help remove moisture from your hearing aids.

If you accidentally get your hearing aids wet, take them to your audiologist. They can use a strong electric drying chamber to dry them and remove the moisture.

## Dehumidifier Kit

A dehumidifier kit is used to prevent moisture buildup in your hearing aids. There are different types of dehumidifier kits.

- Dehumidifier kits may be in a plastic or glass jar. They may also be small electronic machines that circulate air in a larger box.
- The desiccant may be:
  - in a soft pillow with a plastic top
  - in a plastic case with a screen on top
  - large beads that are white and blue.

## Did You Know?

Desiccant is a substance that absorbs moisture. It can be in a soft or hard form.

## How to use the dehumidifier kit

- When you get ready to go to bed, take your hearing aids out.
- Remove the batteries from your hearing aids. If you forget to take the batteries out, it will not hurt the hearing aids, but some of the power will be lost from the battery.
- Place your hearing aids in the container and close the cover tightly.
- Moisture will be absorbed into the desiccant inside the container.
- Take your hearing aids out of the container the next day when you are ready to use them.

# Frequently Asked Questions About Dehumidifier Kits

## How long can I leave my hearing aids in the container?

It is recommended to leave your hearing aids in the sealed container overnight. You can use the kit every night or as your audiologist recommends. If you sweat a lot, place your hearing aids in the container each night.

## How do I know my kit is ready to use?

- For the soft desiccant, a few of the beads will be blue.
- For the hard desiccant, all of the beads will be an amber-yellowish color.

## How do I know when I need to reactivate the desiccant?

- For the soft desiccant, the blue-colored beads will turn white, pink or reddish in color. When there are no blue beads it is time to reactivate.
- For the hard desiccant, the amber beads will turn a dark greenish or brown color.

## How long can I use the desiccant before it has to be reactivated?

There is no way to know how long it will take before it is time to reactivate your desiccant. It depends on how much moisture is in your hearing aids and the environment in your home.

## How do I reactivate my desiccant?

### For the soft desiccant:

- Place the soft or screen-side of the soft pillow up on a microwave-safe plate.
- Heat for 30 seconds to 1 minute on high in the microwave. **Important:** Do not heat for more than 2 minutes in the microwave.
- Let the desiccant cool for 20 minutes. A few of the beads will be blue.
- After the desiccant has cooled, it is ready to use again.

## Important

Never put your hearing aids, batteries or container in the microwave or oven.



## Important

If your hearing aid gets wet from heavy rain, being dropped in water, or worn in the shower call your clinic to make an appointment so that your hearing aids can be dried in an electric dryer.

### For the hard desiccant:

- Place the screen-side up on a microwave-safe plate.
- Heat for 30 seconds to 1 minute on high in the microwave.  
**Important:** Do not heat for more than 2 minutes in the microwave.
- Let the desiccant cool for 20 minutes. All of the beads will be an amber-yellowish color.
- After the desiccant has cooled, it is ready to use again.

You can also use the oven to reactivate the hard desiccant.

- Preheat the oven to 200 F.
- Place the desiccant screen-side up in an oven-safe dish.
- Bake for 1 hour or until beads turn an amber-yellowish color.
- Cool for 20 minutes before handling.

### For the Hal-Hen® Super Dri-Aid™:

- Spread the beads on a microwave-safe plate evenly.
- Put the plate in the microwave.
- Set the power to medium. Heat for 30 seconds.
- Repeat until there are a few blue beads.
- Allow the beads to cool before replacing in the jar.

You can also use the oven to reactivate the super dri-aid.

- Preheat the oven to 350 F.
- Spread the beads on an oven-safe dish evenly and place in the oven.
- Bake uncovered for about 30 minutes.
- If there are no blue beads, continue to bake at 10-minute intervals until you see a few blue beads.
- Allow the beads to dry before placing in the glass jar.

### What happens when the desiccant wears out?

Ask your audiologist for a replacement at your next visit.

## Recommended Follow-up Visits

Follow-up visits are needed to make sure your hearing aids are fitting well.

- After you are fit with your hearing aids, your audiologist will want to see you at least one time during your 45-day trial period. It is common to see your audiologist two to three times during your trial period.
- After you have worn your hearing aids for 2 to 6 months, your audiologist will want to see you at least every 6 months.
- Some people will need to be seen more often and some less often. You and your audiologist will decide what is right for you.

### Why do I need to follow-up?

It is best to come in for the follow-up visits to help prevent problems. If you need to be seen before your next follow-up visit, call your clinic to make an appointment with your audiologist.

### What happens at my follow-up visit?

For the first few visits after your hearing aid fitting your audiologist will:

- make programming adjustments in your hearing aids
- make sure your hearing aids are fitting properly
- review important information with you.

Before your follow-up visits, you may want to make a list of questions or concerns to bring with you to your appointment.

For routine visits, your audiologist will clean your hearing aids. They will use an electric dryer and vacuum to dry the hearing aids and remove debris. If you wear behind-the-ear hearing aids, the tubing will be changed.

Your audiologist will also look in your ears for earwax. They will remove earwax, if needed. If your audiologist isn't able to remove the wax or you have certain medical conditions, you may need to see an ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor for earwax removal.

If you are having problems with your hearing aids, you can talk about them with your audiologist at your appointment.

# Frequently Asked Questions about Hearing Aid Batteries

## Tip

When putting the battery in your hearing aid, do not force the battery door closed. Take the battery out and put it back in again, or try another battery.

## Tip

Ask your audiologist about getting a battery caddy to carry extra batteries with you.

## Important

If a battery is swallowed, call 911 right away.

## Tip

To check the life of your batteries, use a battery tester. If you don't have one, ask your audiologist.

## Why is there a tab on my zinc battery?

A zinc battery uses air as a source of power. A tab (sticker) seals the air holes on the battery. This will make sure your battery is fresh until you are ready to use it. Do not remove the tab until you are ready to use the battery.

To activate the battery, remove the tab. After removing the tab, wait about one minute before inserting the battery into your hearing aid. This allows enough time for the air to enter and activate the battery. Putting the tab back on the battery when it isn't in use will not extend the battery life.

## How should I store my batteries?

You should store your batteries at room temperature. Avoid storing your batteries in hot or cold places since heat and moisture will shorten the life of the batteries. Do not store your batteries in the medicine cabinet or next to your medicine.

Batteries should not be carried loose in your pocket or purse. If a battery comes into contact with a metal object, such as coins or keys, the battery may charge, leak, or even rupture. To prevent this from happening, keep unused batteries in the original packaging or in a battery holder.

Store and throw away batteries in places that cannot be reached by infants, children or pets. Batteries are toxic to people and pets.

## How long will my batteries last?

Battery life is decided by:

- the type of hearing aid
- the amplification (loudness) of your hearing aid
- how long you wear your hearing aid.

Moisture, earwax and hearing aids that are plugged can drain the battery. Your audiologist can tell you how long you can expect your batteries to last.

## **How do I recycle my batteries? Can I just throw them away?**

Batteries can be thrown in the garbage. If you throw them in the garbage, make sure the battery is completely drained before throwing them away.

Batteries can be recycled. Do not put batteries in your recycling bin. Each battery should be taped and placed in an open container. This will help avoid reactions between the batteries. When you are ready, bring them to a location that recycles hearing aid batteries.

Call your local recycling center to find out if they recycle hearing aid batteries.

## **Earwax: What You Need To Know**

Earwax is a waxy oil made by hair follicles and glands inside your ear canal. It cleans and protects your ear and eardrum. Having earwax does not mean your ears are dirty.

Earwax usually works its way out of the ear by itself. Unfortunately, wearing hearing aids can prevent the wax from coming out on its own. Too much earwax can cause feedback (a whistling sound). It can also cause your hearing aids not to work right (malfunction).

### **How to keep earwax from damaging your hearing aids**

Have your ears checked for earwax every 4 to 6 months. If you try to remove the earwax yourself, it can cause:

- temporary (brief) hearing loss
- irritation in the ear canal
- a sore in the ear canal
- a punctured eardrum.

Your audiologist, doctor, or ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor can help watch for earwax buildup in your ears.

### **Tip**

Check your hearing aids for any earwax buildup. You can remove earwax with a wax loop remover or a wax removal brush.

## **Earwax Do's and Don'ts**

### **Do's:**

- Use a warm, wet washcloth to clean the outside of your ears.
- To soften the wax, try using a very small amount of mineral oil or earwax softening drops (found in the pharmacy area). Softening the wax will help it come out on its own. This should not be done if you have a hole in your eardrum.
- Make an appointment with your health care provider if you have discharge, drainage or ear pain.
- See an audiologist if you think you have a sudden or gradual decrease in hearing.

### **Don'ts:**

- Do not put anything into your ears, except your hearing aids. This includes cotton swabs (Q-tips®), keys, hairpins or anything else that fits into the ear canal.
- Do not use an ear candle. They are not effective to remove earwax. Ear candles can cause burning, hearing loss, a hole in the eardrum and pain.
- Do not irrigate your ear at home, unless your audiologist, doctor, or ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor says it is OK and gives you instructions.

## How to Fix Possible Problems with Your Hearing Aids

Problem	Possible Causes	Solutions
No sound is coming out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The hearing aid is not turned on.</li> <li>■ The sound outlet is clogged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make sure that the battery door is completely closed.</li> <li>■ Put in a new battery.</li> <li>■ Clean the earmold or the dome.</li> <li>■ You may need to replace the wax protection.</li> </ul>
Reduced or broken up (intermittent) sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The sound outlet is clogged.</li> <li>■ The battery is worn-out.</li> <li>■ Your ear could be blocked with earwax.</li> <li>■ Your hearing may have changed.</li> <li>■ There are moisture problems caused by sweat or humidity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Clean the earmold or the dome.</li> <li>■ You may need to replace the wax protection.</li> <li>■ Put in a new battery.</li> <li>■ Wipe the battery and hearing aid with a dry cloth.</li> <li>■ Think about purchasing a dehumidifier kit to help prevent moisture problems.</li> <li>■ Make an appointment to see your audiologist.</li> </ul>
Squealing noise in the behind-the-ear hearing aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The hearing aid is not placed in your ear right.</li> <li>■ The tubing is broken, yellow and stiff.</li> <li>■ The tubing came off the earmold or ear hook.</li> <li>■ The ear hook is cracked.</li> <li>■ The earmold fits too loose in your ear.</li> <li>■ Your ear could be blocked with earwax.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Take your hearing aid out and put it back in again. If that does not work, call your audiologist.</li> </ul>
Squealing noise in the in-the-ear hearing aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Earwax may have built up in your ear canal.</li> <li>■ Your hearing aid may be loose in your ear.</li> <li>■ Your hearing aid is not sitting in your ear right.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make an appointment to see your audiologist.</li> </ul>

# Assistive Listening Devices

Assistive listening devices (ALDs) help people hear sounds or understand speech in difficult listening environments. ALDs can be used alone or with hearing aids.

These factors can affect how you understand speech when using hearing aids.

- distance: Sound will get softer as it travels in a room. The softer it gets, that harder it will be to understand speech.
- competing noise: Having competing noises can make it hard to follow conversations. Most hearing aids are able to reduce some background noise, but are not able to completely separate the sounds you want to hear from those you don't want to hear.
- room acoustics: Surfaces such as windows, walls and uncarpeted floors cause sound to echo in the room.

ALDs can help reduce these factors in difficult listening environments.

## Types of ALDs

There are many different types of ALDs. These include:

- devices to improve speech intelligibility (how well you can recognize a spoken word or phrase):
  - personal systems: The sound is picked up by a microphone. It is sent into your ear through a headset on an external "boot" attached to your hearing aid.
  - large area systems: In some meeting rooms or auditoriums there may be a telephone (telecoil) program. This is a wire loop going around the room. If you use this program, you can hear what the speaker says into the microphone.
- devices to connect with electronic media:
  - television
  - telephone
  - cell phone
  - personal music player
- alerting devices:
  - telephone ringing
  - doorbell
  - alarm clock
  - smoke detector.

# Speechreading

Speechreading is a technique used to understand speech. It involves watching and interpreting the movements of the lips, tongue and face. This information along with facial expressions, gestures, content, language and sounds heard through hearing aids help you understand speech. Everyone speechreads when in a noisy or difficult listening situation without even realizing it. Most people feel they can hear better when they see the speaker's face.

It is estimated that only 30 to 40 percent of the sounds of English speech are visible on the lips. Some sounds look the same on the lips, such as "b", "m" and "p." Sometimes the speaker's lips are hidden by a head turn, facial hair or a hand near the mouth.

## Tips for Practicing Speechreading

- When you practice speechreading be sure you can see the speaker's face clearly. Sit so the light source is behind you. Try speechreading from different angles and distances.
- Speechreading without being able to hear the speaker can make you tired. Practice speechreading with the speaker talking out loud and with no voice. Then begin practicing in background noise.

Some people are naturally good speechreaders. Some people need more practice to become better. Most people can improve their speechreading skills with training. Unfortunately, speechreading alone is not enough to understand speech. Speechreading and using hearing aids can increase your understanding of speech.

## How to speechread

There are a number of ways to learn speechreading.

- **Use a handbook.** You can teach yourself by using a handbook on speechreading. This will allow you to practice and progress at your own pace. It is important to practice in front of a mirror. Using a three-way mirror will help you see your facial movements from different angles.
- **Practice with a friend or family member.** It is often easier to speechread with people you know. As you get more comfortable, you can practice speechreading with someone who is less familiar.
- **Watch speakers on video.** Watching speakers on a video can provide you with repetition. This will help you improve your speechreading skills. You can simply watch the same phrase over and over again as needed.
- **Attend a speechreading class.** In some areas, speechreading classes taught by trained professionals are available. These classes also provide support while you are learning.



## **Tips for being successful at speechreading**

- Watch the speaker's expressions. Facial expressions often set the tone of the conversation. How the speaker acts can help you understand what is being said.
- Know the topic of the conversation, if possible. This will make it easier for you to fill in the blanks.
- Speechread for overall content. It is easier to understand a sentence than to recognize and process each individual word.
- If you cannot understand the speaker ask them to reword the entire sentence.
- If you are having problems understanding, wait until the speaker finishes the sentence or thought before you ask a question. You may be able to understand what is being said when the sentence is done.
- Don't be afraid to tell someone to speak a little slower.
- Move to a quiet place to have a conversation where there are fewer distractions, if possible.

### **These situations can make speechreading hard to do:**

- vocabulary or words you don't understand or know
- people who talk fast, don't speak clearly or mumble
- people who have foreign accents
- people who have beards and mustaches.

Using hearing aids that fit right and speechreading may help improve your ability to communicate and understand speech.

# Hearing Aids and Cell Phones

If you would like to have a cell phone that works well with your hearing aids, here is some information that can help you buy the one that is right for you.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires cell phone manufacturers to make phones that work better for people who wear hearing aids. These cell phones need to reduce static, interference and create better telecoil connections. Cell phones also need to be rated for hearing aid compatibility (HAC).

## Hearing aids with and without telecoil

Some hearing aids have a device that works with the telephone. It is called telecoil or t-coil.

The telecoil can be turned on by using a push button or a toggle switch. It picks up a signal from the phone. It may also pick up interference from computers or lights.

If your hearing aids do not have a telecoil, they will still work with the telephone. They will use a program that works with a microphone when talking on the telephone. Most hearing aids will switch to the telephone program on their own, or you may need to press a button.

A telecoil or telephone program will make it easier to hear when talking on the telephone.

## Cell phones ratings

The label on the cell phone package will tell you if it is compatible with your hearing aids. Look for the letter "M" which stands for microphone. This means that this type of cell phone has been tested and rated for hearing aid use.

The higher the "M" rating, the better the cell phone will work with your hearing aids. It is recommended to look for microphone ratings of "M3" or "M4."

If you have a hearing aid with a telecoil, look for a cell phone with a "T" rating. The "T" stands for telecoil. Higher "T" ratings will help you understand speech better through your cell phone. It is recommended to look for cell phones with the ratings of "T3" or "T4."

## Important

Only cell phones that meet a minimum rating of "M3" or "M4" will be labeled for HAC. You can find HAC ratings on the phone's package or in the user manual.

## Tip

If you have any questions about your hearing aid ratings, talk with your audiologist.

## Hearing aid ratings

Hearing aid manufacturers also rate hearing aids. These ratings show how well the telecoil or microphone work when being used.

- For hearing aids with a telecoil, the ratings go from T1 to T4.
- For hearing aids without a telecoil (which use a microphone) the ratings go from M1 to M4.

## Combine cell phone and hearing aid ratings

Cell phone and hearing aid ratings can be combined to increase your chance of getting the best experience from your cell phone.

For example, if your cell phone has a rating of M4 and your hearing aid has a rating of M1, that adds up to a total rating of 5.

Each person's hearing loss is unique. These ratings do not guarantee that you will not have any problems when using your cell phone.

The chart below shows the combined ratings and what type of performance you can expect.

Rating	Performance
A combined rating of 6	This rating will give you the best performance.
A combined rating of 5	This rating will give you normal performance. It will work for regular telephone use.
A combined rating of 4	This rating will be good for short phone calls, but not for regular phone use.

## Tips for buying a cell phone that works well with your hearing aids

- The ratings are guidelines to help you find a cell phone that is better for you to use with hearing aids.
- Try a cell phone before you buy it. Ask your cell phone company if it is possible to try the phone outside of the store. Also ask about the warranty and how long you can return it if it does not work.

# How Untreated Hearing Loss Can Affect Your Life

Each person is affected differently by hearing loss. Wearing a hearing aid can help you hear better, making it easier to understand speech and hear other sounds around you.

When hearing loss goes untreated or you stop wearing your hearing aids, it can affect many different parts of your life.

## Social

- **Isolation from family and friends.** Hearing loss can affect your ability to communicate well with others. This can cause you to feel embarrassed, frustrated, and/or tired. You may avoid talking to people or going to social events. This can cause you to feel lonely or distant from others.
- **Avoiding social situations.** Hearing loss can affect your participation in activities where it is hard to hear. These activities may include going to plays, movies, religious services, restaurants and social gatherings.
- **Social phobia:** Hearing loss may make you feel worried about embarrassing yourself in front of others. You may believe that other people are watching you, waiting for you to make a mistake. You are likely to dread most social situations and withdraw from others.

## Emotional

- **Embarrassment:** You may feel embarrassed if you don't understand what the conversation was about, you respond wrong to a question or miss the punch line of a joke.
- **Anger and frustration:** It can be frustrating to live with untreated hearing loss. You may remember what it was like to hear well and wish it was still that way. Each time you misunderstand information or need it repeated, you are reminded of your hearing loss. You may get angry at others when they suggest that you are missing things or should get hearing aids.
- **Depression:** Hearing loss can make you feel overwhelmed and helpless. Depression can be common in people who have hearing loss that goes untreated.
- **Fatigue:** If you have hearing loss, it takes more energy and focus to hear what is said. This can make you feel tired and keep you away from activities you enjoy.

## Physical

- **Trouble understanding speech:** If left untreated, hearing loss can cause your auditory (hearing) system to not work as well. Your ears will have a harder time processing speech. Wearing hearing aids will help keep the parts of your brain that process sound active.

## Safety

- **Environmental awareness:** Hearing is important for connecting to others as well as the world around you. Your hearing makes you aware of an approaching car, the doorbell chime, the oven timer and much more. These sounds provide cues that allow you to recognize your surroundings.
- **Alerting devices:** Many alerting devices use sound to get your attention, such as fire detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. If you cannot hear these sounds it can affect your safety.

## Resources

### Websites

- American Academy of Audiology  
[audiology.org](http://audiology.org)
- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
[asha.org](http://asha.org)
- American Tinnitus Association  
[ata.org](http://ata.org)
- Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA), Inc.  
[alda.org](http://alda.org)
- Better Hearing Institute  
[betterhearing.org](http://betterhearing.org)
- Hearing Loss Association of America  
[hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org)
- Minnesota Department of Human Services  
(Go to *People We Serve*. Click on *People with Disabilities*, then *Services*. Click on *Deaf and hard of hearing services*.)  
[dhs.state.mn.us](http://dhs.state.mn.us)

### Vocational rehabilitation services

- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development  
[positivelyminnesota.com](http://positivelyminnesota.com)







[allinahealth.org](http://allinahealth.org)