

Information for Family and Friends of a Hearing Aid User

Who is this information for?

This information is for patients, families and carers living with a person who uses a hearing aid.

What is the impact on a person who has hearing loss?

- increased concentration is required for understanding, which for many is very demanding and causes enormous strain and fatigue.
- Social withdrawal or endless talk is common, attempting to avoid having to listen to others or run the risk of misinterpretation and inappropriate responses.
- Difficulty in understanding group conversations or social situations.
- Frustration for both the person experiencing the hearing difficulty and those in his/her environment.
- The jeopardising of safety.
- Anxiety, depression and loss of confidence.

What are the limitations of lip reading?

- Normal speech is faster than people are consciously capable of seeing.
- Many speech sounds look exactly the same and some sounds cannot be seen on the lips at all, such as 'k', 'h' and 'g'.
- Some speakers are very difficult to lip read, especially if they cover their mouth, smoke, have a beard or eat while speaking.
- Some environments make lip reading difficult, such as rooms with poor lighting.
- The best lip readers can only pick up 1/3 of what is said in conversation.
- Listening with a hearing aid as well as looking at the person when speaking becomes the key to successful communication.

What is recruitment and how can we manage it?

- Recruitment is a process in which there is increased sensitivity to loud sounds in those with a hearing loss. This is why many people hard of hearing seem sensitive to raised voices and other loud sounds.
- If the hearing aid user cannot find a comfortable volume, it either seems too loud or too soft, they should consult their audiologist for adjustment. Improved hearing aid fitting techniques include measuring the degree of sensitivity to loud sounds.
- ALL hearing aids can be programmed so that loud sounds will not be amplified above the limit of tolerance. This provides protection and ensures that the hearing aid user is not subjected to uncomfortable or painfully loud volume levels.

Will they need time to adjust to a new hearing aid?

- A new hearing aid should reduce the need to concentrate, but concentration will still be greater than for people with normal hearing.
- A hearing aid does not return the hearing to normal, but accentuates audible hearing by amplifying impaired frequencies to improve speech understanding and environmental awareness.
- The clarity achievable by a hearing aid will be dependent upon the type and degree of hearing loss present.
- People with normal hearing are able to focus on what they want to hear and ignore background noise, but those with a hearing aid may find this more difficult.
- Adjusting to new amplified sound patterns experienced through a hearing aid can take up to several months.
- For the first few days, the hearing aid user may prefer to wear the hearing aid only at home, so that some control can be maintained over sounds being listened to (SEE HEARING AIDS INFORMATION SHEET)
- It is important to wear the hearing aid for at least 3 to 4 hours every day to assist with the adjustment process. This gives the aid user more confidence about managing the switches and controls. If there is discomfort with the sound, return to your audiologist for adjustment.

What can I do to help?

- Encouragement and support from family and friends is very important so that the aid user is able to realise the benefits obtained from the aid.
- Gain the person's attention before speaking. This gives the person the opportunity to look at you and concentrate on what you are saying.
- Make sure that you can clearly be seen. Avoid talking from another room. You probably will not be heard or, even if you are, understanding will be extremely difficult.
- Remember to give those with a hearing loss every chance to see all of your face clearly. If at all possible, try to be seen at the same eye level when speaking.
- Try to have a light shining on your face. Lighting behind your back creates glare for the listener and makes lip reading difficult.
- Reduce background noise as much as possible.

How do I speak to someone who is hearing impaired?

- Speak distinctly and clearly and a little slower than normal.
- Move your lips and use facial expressions
- Use gestures to enhance speech and write down key words if necessary.
- Do not shout. This distorts facial expression as well as speech and the loud sound may cause discomfort and distortion to the hearing aid user.
- Move closer to the person and repeat or rephrase your message.

- Be patient and keep a sense of humour.

Concerns or questions?

You can contact your ENT Specialist at the Melbourne ENT Group (MEG):

- Phone: 1300- 952-808
- Email: admin@melbentgroup.com.au
- Website: www.melbentgroup.com.au



Your regular Audiologist is also an excellent resource and source of support and further adjustment/consultation

Your GP is also the best contact for ongoing care and concerns.


Further Information

The Vicdeaf Rehabilitation Team runs regular courses to help people manage their hearing loss. The attendance of family and friends is also welcomed. These courses are held in various locations. For further details, please contact Vicdeaf on (03) 9473 1111 or

www.vicdeaf.com.au



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