



Common questions parents ask about hearing aids

FOR MILD OR UNILATERAL HEARING LOSS

Q. How might hearing aids help my baby?

A. When a child has a mild hearing loss, it's difficult to predict whether hearing aids will help. Your audiologist will discuss your baby's test results with you.

A hearing aid may enable your child to hear quiet and distant sounds. This could make it easier for your child to:

- * Learn from overhearing other people talk and interact with each other.
- * Hear soft environmental sounds that provide information about what's happening around them.
- * Hear soft speech sounds (for example, 'f', 's', 'th') more easily. This should help them understand speech more easily and to learn to make these sounds in their own speech.
- * Listen to and understand conversations with less effort.

When a child has a unilateral hearing loss the hearing aid might also help your child to

- * hear speech more easily when spoken to on the hearing impaired side
- * hear speech more clearly in background noise.

The benefit will depend upon the degree of hearing loss in the affected ear.

Q. Are there any disadvantages to using hearing Aids?

A. Some older children with a mild hearing loss find that a hearing aid does not overcome their biggest problem – hearing when there is background noise. It's possible that if they had used hearing aids from a younger age they might find it easier to use hearing aids when they are older – but we can't know for sure.

Some people find that the benefits of wearing a hearing aid are outweighed by the disadvantages, such as having to wear something on their ear and looking after the hearing aid. This is an individual choice that depends on the extent of the hearing loss, the person's motivation and the support of others.

Q. Is it safe?

A. A hearing aid trial should not cause your child's hearing to worsen. Modern hearing aids are very sophisticated and automatically adjust for the loudness of the incoming sound. The hearing aid prescription formula we use has been developed by world-leading researchers and has been proven to be safe.

Q. How often does my baby need to wear the hearing aids?

A. Hearing aids need to be used every day to make a difference to a child's speech and language development. Ideally, a baby or child would wear their aids for all their waking hours, only taking them off for bathing or swimming.

Q. What sort of hearing aids will my baby have to wear?

A. Babies and young children need to use a behind-the-ear style of hearing aid because their ears are not large enough for in-the-ear aids.

Q. Is it possible to trial some hearing aids?

A. Yes, you can trial hearing aids.

Q. What if I change my mind?

A. If you later decide that hearing aids are not beneficial for your baby you can stop using them. Children are eligible for hearing services through Australian Hearing up to the age of 26. This includes the provision of high quality, fully subsidised hearing aids to children with hearing loss. There will be no cost for returning the trial hearing aids if they were fully subsidised. You can reconsider and review the option of hearing aids with your child's audiologist at any time in the future.

Q. How can I tell if the hearing aids help my baby?

A. The effects of a mild hearing loss or unilateral hearing loss can be quite subtle. Fitting hearing aids is a preventive approach – we are trying to stop problems from developing. You may not notice dramatic changes in your child's hearing, but this does not mean the hearing aids have failed. You and your audiologist will work together to decide whether the hearing aids have helped or not.

Children need to wear their hearing aids consistently and for several months to ensure they've had a chance to do well with the hearing aids. Be prepared to trial the hearing aids for at least six months.

Q. What if I decide not to try hearing aids?

A. If you decide not to try hearing aids there are still ways you can help your baby.

- * Everyday family activities are a rich learning environment for the development of language. Talk and sing to your baby. Give your baby lots of opportunities to learn through family conversations and play. Make reading a regular and enjoyable part of your family's day and have fun with music and singing.

- * Whenever you can, be close and make eye contact when talking to your baby. Babies are more responsive to close speakers. Eye contact is also an important stepping stone in learning to talk.

- * If your baby cries, laughs or pulls faces, respond with your voice and face. This is the start of "conversations" with your baby. By responding to your baby you encourage your baby to communicate again.

- * All babies and young children hear someone talking to them better when there is no background noise. If you are making time to talk or read to your baby, try to do it without the TV or radio on in the background.

- * Sit on the floor with your knees bent and your baby lying back against your legs. Now you can hold or tickle your baby's hands, feet or tummy while you talk face to face.

When your child reaches school age, there are other devices that can be used to help with specific classroom listening situations. Your audiologist can provide you with more information. The following Australian Hearing information sheets may also interest you:

Management of children who have a permanent, unaided hearing loss.

Options for children who have a unilateral hearing loss.



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