



Helping your aided baby to hear

(ZERO TO 12 MONTHS)

HEARING AIDS ARE VITAL IN DEVELOPING YOUR BABY'S ABILITY TO LISTEN AND SPEAK. THE AIM IS FOR YOUR BABY TO WEAR HEARING AIDS FOR ALL THEIR WAKING HOURS, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IT TAKES A WHILE FOR SOME BABIES TO GET USED TO THEIR HEARING AIDS, BUT WITH ENCOURAGEMENT AND PERSEVERANCE, THEY WILL BECOME A NORMAL PART OF YOUR BABY'S LIFE.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO INCREASE THE USE OF HEARING AIDS AS YOUR BABY DEVELOPS.

In these very early stages, it may be difficult to tell whether your baby is hearing with the aids. Don't be discouraged. Young babies can't do much to show you they are hearing. Find out more about how to tell if your baby is hearing in the information sheet *Signs of hearing from birth to six months of age*.

Signs of hearing become more obvious as your baby gets older. At about six months of age, babies usually have some head control and will be learning to sit up. At this age, you might notice your baby's head turn towards some sounds.

Over the next few months your baby will start to show increased interest in a wider range of sounds than when they were younger. Your audiologist will be able to tell you the types of sounds your baby can hear with the hearing aids.

Check the hearing aids every day

It's important to check your baby's hearing aids daily as it is the only way to know if they are working properly. This is a routine you will need to continue until your child is old enough to tell you if something is wrong with the aids.

Your audiologist will show you how to check the hearing aids. Most people need to be shown a few times before they feel confident. Your audiologist will be happy to review the procedure with you as often you like.

Day to day use of hearing aids from zero to six months

The hearing aid may produce a whistling sound when your baby is lying down or leaning. This is called acoustic feedback and is a common problem for newborns. It happens because the ears are small and soft and your baby spends a lot of time with their ear pressed against a surface, such as when sleeping or feeding.

You can reduce feedback by using a lubricant. Your audiologist can recommend a lubricant suitable for hearing aids. Young babies may need new earmoulds every few weeks to reduce the feedback.

Try to use the hearing aids as much as you can, in ways that still allow you to enjoy spending time with your baby. It helps if you can make wearing the hearing aids part of your baby's routine.

If you can only use the hearing aids for certain times of the day:

- Pick times when you are free to spend time with your baby, talking or singing
- Pick a quiet place where there is no background noise, and turn off the television and radio
- If you can, position your baby so that there is nothing up against the ears, so that the hearing aids do not whistle
- Try to make sure your baby can see your face and mouth as you speak.

A bouncinette can be helpful. Your baby's head and neck are supported and you can face your baby directly with a clear view of your face. If you use a bouncinette, a netting fabric cover is a good idea because the netting reduces the risk of whistling from the hearing aids.

Alternatively, you could sit upright on a chair or the floor with your baby lying in your lap. Place your baby's head on your knees and legs on your chest. You can get good eye contact and it is a good position for playing 'Peek-a-boo' or 'This little piggy went to market'.

Day-to-day use of the hearing aids from six to 12 months

As your baby spends more of the day awake, try to increase use of the hearing aids until they are worn for all waking hours.

You may need to spend five minutes playing games with your baby after you first put on the hearing aids. There will be less need for this distraction as your baby becomes familiar with the aids. The hearing aids will become a normal part of life just like clothes, shoes, hats and all the other things that babies get used to.

When babies gain more control of their head and neck, the problem of acoustic feedback (whistling) usually lessens. But, your baby's ears will still be soft and grow quickly, so you may need to continue getting new earmoulds frequently. Using a lubricant can help reduce feedback. Your audiologist will be able to recommend a lubricant that is suitable for use with hearing aids.

Learning about sounds and voices

You will have more opportunities to help your baby learn about speech and other sounds as the hearing aids are worn more often. Here are some tips for helping the development of your baby's listening skills.

- **Talk and sing:** Spend time every day verbally interacting with your baby. Position yourself about one metre from your baby's hearing aids.
- **Describe your actions:** As you go about your daily activities, talk to your baby about what you are doing.
- **Exaggerate your voice:** Try to overstress the normal variations of pitch as you speak. Many people do this naturally when they talk to babies.
- **Use music:** If you are listening to music, let your baby see you sing along. You might like to pick your baby up and dance together every now and then.
- **Play games:** Try to play games that involve sound.
- **Pair sounds with actions:** Join interesting sounds with fun activities. For example, make aeroplane sounds while you fly your baby around the room or say 'hop-hop-hop' as you step your fingers up your baby's leg and tickle their tummy. And, don't forget the traditional baby games like 'peek-a-boo'.
- **Copy your baby:** Repeat any sound your baby makes. See if you can have a conversation, making sounds to each other in turn.
- **Use rewards:** When your baby responds to a sound, give a reward such as a smile, clap or cuddle. At this age, babies can learn very quickly how to get your attention. If your baby finds your reaction fun, they are more likely to respond to the sounds again.
- **Don't rely on external stimulation:** Noisy toys can be lots of fun, but babies are generally more interested in human voices. Don't rely on toys, TV or radio to provide lots of stimulation for your baby. Some TV, radio and music is fine, but interaction with you is much more interesting.
- **Reduce background noise:** When you spend special time with your baby (talking, singing or playing games), try to reduce background noise so your baby can hear you as clearly as possible. Turn off the TV or radio.
- **Let your baby explore your mouth:** Many babies at this age start to put their hands into your mouth as they explore your face. This can be a good chance for your baby to feel your mouth and tongue moving as you speak.

Feeding your baby – zero to six months

Feeding is a special time with your baby. Most babies are cuddled close

while they feed so whistling from one or both hearing aids can be a problem.

Cuddling is important, both for you and your baby. You may be able to find a way to cuddle your baby that does not cause the aids to whistle. Otherwise, turn off one or both hearing aids at this time. If you can only leave one hearing aid turned on, this is still helpful.

Remember to turn the aids back on after feeding if your baby is still awake.

Feeding your baby – six to 12 months

By this age, many babies sit in high chairs for meals. Feeding your baby is an ideal opportunity to talk about what you're doing and introduce your baby to important phrases and words. Describe your baby's food. Ask your baby if they want 'More?' and of course, talk to your baby about the food being 'All gone!'

Advice at any age

Bath time

The hearing aids should not get wet so you need to take them out when your baby has a bath.

Sleeping

Hearing aids are usually removed for sleeping, mainly for comfort. It will not harm your baby to wear the hearing aids while sleeping, although it might be a bit uncomfortable.

The bedding behind your baby's head may cause the hearing aid to whistle. This may be annoying for you. Your baby may or may not hear the whistle, depending on the degree of hearing loss. In any case, the sounds heard will be affected by the feedback.

- If your baby dozes off with the aids on, you can either leave them in and turn them off, or take them out.
- If you are trying to settle your baby to sleep, you may want to turn the hearing aids off or take them out beforehand.

When your baby is not wearing hearing aids

At times, it's impractical for your baby to wear hearing aids. Your baby may not want to wear them when tired, for example. There are a few ways you can help make it easier for your baby to hear.

- **Amplify your voice:** Speak in a raised voice, but don't shout. Shouting makes your speech less clear. Instead, speak up as though you are talking to someone on the other side of the room.
- **Keep your baby nearby:** Your voice will be louder and it will be easier to hear and see you if you are close. Even if your baby cannot hear you, being able to see you will make your baby feel secure.
- **Cuddle your baby:** This is a good time to hold and cuddle your baby as you talk, because feedback won't be a problem. Some people suggest holding your baby snuggled up under your chin or cheek, enabling the vibrations from your voice to be felt.

If your baby pulls the hearing aids off

At about six months of age, babies start gaining more control of their hands and begin to explore the world around them. Just as many babies find it interesting to pull off their shoes and socks, some babies love to pull off their hearing aids. Some babies also put them in their mouths.

Replace the hearing aid if your baby pulls it off. Try to stay calm. If your baby keeps pulling the aid off, or if replacing it develops into a struggle, put the hearing aid away for 15 minutes and try again later. This will help avoid a situation where your baby gets your attention by pulling the hearing aids off.

Helpful hints for keeping the hearing aids on your baby

Here are a few ideas for preventing your baby from pulling the hearing aids off.

- **Aviator caps:** Some parents use little cotton 'aviator caps' which come down over the baby's ears and tie under the chin. Providing the cap is made of thin fabric (like a t-shirt) the single layer of cotton over the hearing aid microphones makes very little difference to the sound reaching the hearing aid microphones. Soft baby headbands are an alternative, but be careful not to cover the hearing aid microphone with thick fabric.
- **Huggies:** Some parents use 'Huggies' which are available from your Australian Hearing centre. A 'Huggy' is a clear rubber ring with two bands to hold the hearing aid. The ring is fitted over your baby's ear to hold the hearing aid behind the ear.

Your audiologist can show you how these work.
- **Double-sided tape:** You can get tape made for use on skin that will hold the hearing aid firmly against your baby's head. Your hearing centre can supply you with this tape.

- **Clips:** Your audiologist can give you a clip with cords that attach to the hearing aids. This stops the hearing aids from being lost and can make it harder for your baby to get the hearing aids into their mouth.

Keeping your baby safe

Hearing aids contain small parts that can be dangerous if swallowed. Your audiologist will give you a separate information sheet about hearing aid safety.

All hearing aids from Australian Hearing for babies are fitted tamper-proof battery door locks. Make sure you use this feature while your baby is young.

Try to avoid your baby chewing on the earmould, in case it is accidentally swallowed.

Keep the hearing aids out of reach when they are not in your baby's ears.

Feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you have with our audiologists. They will be happy to help you.



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