

The whistling hearing aid

WHISTLING IS A PROBLEM THAT SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCE WITH HEARING AIDS. IT'S CALLED 'FEEDBACK' AND CAN RESTRICT THE BENEFIT OF AN AID.

Feedback is caused by amplified sounds from the hearing aid leaking out from inside the ear through tiny spaces between the earmould and the ear, and then going back into the microphone of the hearing aid.

A hearing aid can whistle when it is held in your hand or if you turn it on before putting it in your ear or if you cover it with your hand while it's in the ear. Once it is placed in your ear properly and at your preferred volume setting, it should not whistle.

Some reasons for feedback (whistling) and what can be done to stop it.

1. EAR WAX

Wax is produced by cells lining the ear canal and its purpose is to prevent foreign bodies getting in your ear canal and causing infection.

Excessive wax build-up in the ear can be a cause of feedback as it blocks the sound from travelling down the ear canal to the inner ear.

Solutions

- * Ask your local doctor or visit your Australian Hearing centre to see if there is any build-up of wax.

If there is too much wax it will have to be removed by a doctor.

- * If your ears are free of wax and the hearing aid is constantly whistling when in the ear and on your preferred volume level, then the best solution is often a new earmould.



2. EARMOULD NOT SITTING IN THE EAR PROPERLY

An earmould not inserted into the ear correctly can also cause feedback. Sometimes the ear mould can work its way loose due to ear and jaw movement, breaking the 'seal' between the earmould and the ear and leaving space for the sound to leak out. This can occur for a number of reasons. For example, the canal portion of the earmould may be a little short, or movement of the jaw (as in chewing or talking) may cause the

ear canal to keep changing shape and allow too much movement of the earmould in the ear. A change (loss or gain) of body weight can also affect the placement of the earmould and cause feedback in all types of hearing aids.

Solutions

- * Make sure that your hearing aid and earmould are correctly positioned in the ear. Check in the mirror or ask family or a friend to make sure that it is inserted properly.
- * If you have a mould that is difficult to insert you may find that using a lubricant will make it slide in more easily. This is available from your hearing centre. If you have ear infections or skin problems we recommend you check with a Doctor first before using lubricant in your ears.
- * If you are having continual difficulty in putting the earmould in your ear or it appears to be loose or does not fit as well as it did originally, then you should contact your Australian Hearing centre for assistance.

- * To have a new earmould made you may need an appointment for a new ear impression. Sometimes new earmoulds can be made from a previous impression.
- * If you have an in-the-ear-style hearing aid, you will be without your aid while the new earmould shell is being made.
- * If you have a behind-the-ear or body-worn hearing aid, you may find that using a lubricant will help reduce the feedback by filling in the little spaces between the mould and the ear while you're waiting for your new earmould. You can get lubricant from your Australian Hearing centre. Turning the volume down slightly on your hearing aid may also stop the aid from whistling.

3. TUBING

The plastic tubing of the mould for behind-the-ear hearing aids can become brittle with age and split, allowing sound to leak out.

Solution

- * Take the hearing aid and earmould back to your Australian Hearing centre for repair.

4. DEGREE OF HEARING LOSS

Feedback is more common when the hearing aid is a powerful one, as there is more sound available to leak out.

A well fitting earmould is important for people with severe hearing losses.

Solutions

- * People with more powerful (high gain) behind-the-ear or body worn hearing aids will generally require new earmoulds at least once a year
- * Contact your hearing centre for an impression appointment. Meanwhile, you can turn your hearing aid down and/or use a lubricant on the earmould.

5. Ear mould material

Soft materials ensure a better and more comfortable fit when used with powerful behind-the-ear or body worn hearing aids. Unfortunately, soft moulds shrink and deteriorate more quickly than the hard materials commonly used with lower power hearing aids and will need to be replaced more frequently.

Solution

- * If your earmould has discoloured and/or hardened you will need a new earmould. Contact your Australian Hearing centre for an appointment.

6. INCREASING VOLUME (LOUDNESS) OF HEARING AID

When you are fitted with your hearing aid, it is usually set at a mid level volume for your normal listening needs, so that you can increase the volume if required.

If you find that you continually have to increase the volume on the hearing aid, the aid may whistle.

Solution

- * If you are routinely turning up your hearing aid past its original volume setting, you should take the hearing aid to your Australian Hearing centre for a technical check. If the hearing aid is working correctly, you should arrange an appointment for a new hearing test to see if your hearing has changed.

What can be done if there is a chronic feedback problem?

Your clinician can ask the earmould laboratories for 'problem' moulds to be specially modified, for example, by putting extra wax or 'buildup' around those parts of the ear mould where sound commonly leaks out causing feedback. Sometimes it's a process of trial and error, but a solution can usually be found.

