

# What you should know about hearing instruments

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For many people, hearing loss is a natural and gradual part of the aging process. Hearing loss can also be caused by genetic medical conditions, ear infections, illness, traumatic injury or prolonged exposure to noise.

### A common problem

Hearing loss is one of the world's most common health problems. It is also one of the most ignored problems, and this is unfortunate because hearing loss and its psychological side effects are highly treatable.

### Hearing without understanding

Hearing loss is not like listening to sounds with the volume turned down. Instead, you may notice that certain spoken sounds — like sh, th and f — are more difficult to hear than others. That's why people with hearing loss often say they can hear people talking but can't understand what is being said.

### The problem goes beyond hearing

While most hearing losses do not cause physical pain, they often have social and psychological affects. These include: breakdown of communication, social isolation, employment difficulties, depression, frustration and loss of self-esteem. Untreated hearing loss in children can delay the development of speech, language and learning skills.



## Signs of hearing loss

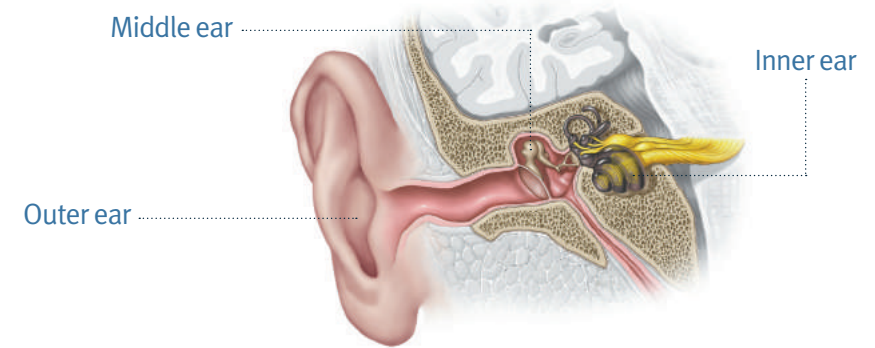
If you suspect you are experiencing hearing loss, consider these questions:

- Do you often ask others to repeat themselves?
- Do you turn up the TV or radio louder than others prefer?
- Is it particularly difficult to understand conversation when there is background noise?
- Does it often seem as though others are mumbling when they speak to you?
- Do you have difficulty following group conversations?
- Do you find it difficult to identify from which direction sounds are coming?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have a hearing loss – and by enquiring about having your hearing tested, you’ve taken a very important step. Discovering that you have a hearing loss can be difficult to accept at first, and you’re not alone. Many people with hearing loss wait years to take action. That’s a long time to live with an issue that can be readily addressed with hearing instruments.

## Understanding hearing loss

The ear is made up of three parts: the outer ear, middle ear and inner ear. Each part has a special function that allows us to hear. Sound is received by the outer ear and travels down the ear canal to the eardrum in the middle ear. The middle ear sends sound vibrations to the inner ear where over 30,000 tiny hair cells connected to the hearing nerve transmit hearing signals to the brain.



## Types of hearing loss

1. **Conductive hearing loss:** sound is blocked in the outer or middle ear

Causes:

- Excessive ear wax
- Damaged ear drum
- Ear infection or fluid in the middle ear
- Stiffness in the bones of the middle ear (otosclerosis)

Solution:

- Most often medically treated with high success
- Hearing instruments can be very successful if unable to treat medically

2. **Sensorineural hearing loss:** damage to the inner ear hair cells or hearing nerve impairs the transmission of complete sound signals to the brain

Causes:

- Aging
- Noise exposure
- Hereditary factors

Solution:

- Cannot be corrected with medicine or surgery
- Hearing aids can be very helpful





95% of people with hearing loss can benefit from the use of hearing instruments.<sup>2</sup>

Today there's such a wide choice of hearing instruments to suit every need, style and budget: the benefits truly outweigh the costs.

### Why now is the time to take action

If you're feeling hesitant about taking the next step, consider the vast improvements in quality of life experienced by people who take action and address their hearing loss. Studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that once they begin using hearing instruments, people enjoy great improvements in social, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, including:

- Communication in relationships
- Intimacy and warmth in family relationships
- Ease of communication
- Physical health
- Sense of control over life events
- Emotional stability
- Perception of mental functioning
- Earning power
- Participation in social situations

### The benefits of today's hearing instruments:

- There is an unprecedented variety of features and looks available to suit your specific hearing loss, listening environments, budget and style.
- Hearing instruments are getting smaller, blending discreetly with hair and skin tones to make some styles virtually invisible.
- New automatic features make hearing instruments very easy to use – some hardly need to be touched after you put them on.
- In addition to amplifying sound, digital technology can help highlight speech and reduce the discomfort of background noises.
- Wireless technologies allow you to connect your modern devices with your hearing instruments, including mobile phones, MP3 players, TVs and more.

The sooner you act, the sooner you can reconnect with the important sounds, conversations and people in your life.

If your hearing loss is in both ears, then wearing two hearing instruments is the best way to hear the most naturally.



We naturally process sound with two ears. So it makes perfect sense that if your hearing loss is in both ears, you'll hear more naturally by wearing two hearing instruments. Wearing only one can make it challenging to follow conversations and to know which direction sounds are coming from.

### Improved ability to locate sound

Knowing which direction sounds are coming from relies on having two equally functioning ears. Sounds in your environment reach the closest ear a fraction of a second faster (and at a slightly higher intensity) than they reach the ear that's further away. This tiny difference is communicated to your brain, which then determines where the sound is coming from and how far away it is. This is important — and potentially life-saving — information. Imagine that you heard a car horn honk: if you were wearing only one hearing instrument, you might not know which way to move to get out of the car's path.



Wearing two hearing instruments — also called a binaural fitting — offers many advantages, including improving your hearing in noise, creating a more natural “stereo effect” and permitting better sound identification and localization.

### Improved comfort and natural sound

Two hearing instruments allow you to hear sounds more naturally because the human auditory system is designed to pick up sound signals using both ears. Many people also find that listening with two ears is easier than listening with one, because you don't have to strain to hear with your “good” ear.

### Improved hearing in noise

For people with hearing loss, it is even more difficult to hear conversation in noise than for those with normal hearing. When you take away the function of one ear it becomes almost impossible. That's because your brain needs input from both ears in order to separate sounds effectively. With two hearing instruments, your capacity to suppress unwanted background noise is improved, making it easier to hear conversations. Two hearing instruments also allow you to keep the volume a little lower, so you hear less of the unwanted background noise.

Today, there are many great styles and choices — one is just right for you.



Choosing the right hearing instruments comes down to a number of factors: your hearing loss, the features and look you prefer, and your lifestyle.

### Before you choose

To help you determine which type of hearing instrument is best for you, your hearing healthcare professional will walk you through a number of considerations, including:

**Degree of hearing loss:** not all styles and technologies are appropriate for all hearing losses

**Ear anatomy:** some ear canals are very tiny, making it almost impossible to fit a completely-in-the-canal style (CIC)

**Lifestyle:** your different listening environments will help dictate the best hearing instrument to meet your needs

**Manual dexterity:** CIC, ITC, and ITE styles are easy to insert, but require steady hands

**Design preference:** choose from a wide variety of styles, colors and sizes

**Budget:** a wide range of prices to fit every budget



## Choices for everyone

Hearing instrument styles differ in their appearance and how they fit on and in your ears and offer different advantages depending on the design, size and technology. Most styles are available in a wide range of colors to suit your needs. Your hearing healthcare professional can help you choose the style that's right for you.



**Behind-the-ear (BTE)** sits comfortably behind your ear, with sounds passing through a tube to an earmold that fits in your outer ear.

Mild to profound hearing losses



**Receiver-in-canal (RIC)** is a behind-the-ear solution that uses a tiny speaker in the ear canal to deliver quality sound. This provides more natural sound and less occlusion ("blocked ear" feeling) than a traditional BTE.

Mild to severe hearing losses



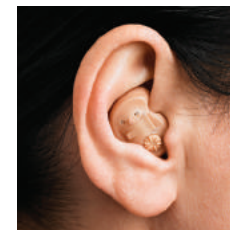
**Completely-in-the-canal (CIC)** fits deep inside your ear canal, making it almost invisible.

Mild to moderately severe hearing losses



**In-the-canal (ITC)** fits almost entirely inside your ear canal. The slight size increase allows the ITC to accommodate options that may not fit on a CIC.

Mild to moderately severe hearing losses



**In-the-ear (ITE)** fits securely in your outer ear and provides sufficient space for extra options.

Mild to severe hearing losses

Improving your hearing re-connects you to your world, to the people you care about and the activities you might be missing out on. Once you've decided to take this important step, here's what you can expect.



If hearing instruments are the solution for you, your hearing healthcare professional will help you choose one that fits your hearing loss, lifestyle, design preferences and budget. Depending on the style you select, you may have your fitting at the same appointment, or you may have customized ear molds made and return for a fitting in a few weeks.

## Your fitting

During your fitting your hearing healthcare professional will ensure:

- You have a comfortable fit
- Your hearing instruments are programmed for your hearing loss, set to a comfortable volume level and programmed to work optimally in your most common listening environments
- You learn about your hearing instruments, including how to use, insert, remove, and care for them, and how to change the batteries

After your fitting, try out your hearing instruments in different environments. Talk to your family and friends and note how things sound. If things sound different, it is perfectly natural. Give yourself time – and patience – to become comfortable with your new hearing.

## Your follow-up

Your follow-up visit takes place after a few weeks of wearing your new hearing instruments. This is the time to:

- Share your experiences – the more information you provide, the more your hearing healthcare professional can ensure your hearing instruments are working optimally for you
- Fine tune your hearing instruments – with the information you provide, your hearing healthcare professional can make any necessary adjustments to improve your listening experience