



Choosing the right hearing aid

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Hearing loss is a common condition affecting older adults. In Singapore, those who above 60 years old, it is estimated that over 80 percent may have some degree of hearing loss.

BY: Eleanor Yap



An "in the ear" hearing aid.

You have been told you may need a hearing aid. But you have some concerns like the cost, choosing the right one from the many types of hearing aids and the issue of ambient noise even with a hearing aid. **Agelessonline** speaks to Dr David Lau, a specialist in ear, nose and throat surgery at Raffles ENT Centre, to find out whether hearing aids are more trouble than they are worth:

What are some of hearing aids that [available](#) currently?

There is a huge array of hearing aids available, with a range of technologies as well as styles. Modern hearing aids [process](#) sound digitally and can be programmed to correct specific patterns of hearing loss, reduce noise and feedback, and even log data for optimal tuning.

The conventional hearing aid style is BTE or "behind the ear", in which the microphone and amplifier are hooked behind the ear and joined by a small tube to a receiver or earpiece. Alternatively, ITE or "in the ear" hearing aids are, as the name suggests, worn in the ear. ITC (in the canal), and CIC (completely in the canal) are progressively smaller versions of the ITE hearing aid.

Small ITE hearing aids are less conspicuous but can be difficult to handle, especially for the elderly; and may be more prone to feedback (whistling when the hearing aid picks up sound from its own earpiece), especially when hearing loss is severe.

What are some hearing aid options to improve hearing in specific situations?

Background noise can create problems for hearing aid users as noise effectively smothers speech. Noise reduction features and directional microphones may help communication in noisy environments.

In a classroom or auditorium where the speaker and listener are further apart, and background noise and reverberation interfere with hearing, remote devices can be used to transmit sound from a microphone [close](#) to the presenter to a receiver on the listener's hearing aid. FM devices and telecoils are two examples.

Connectivity is important these days, and hearing aids can also have wireless capability. These hearing aids enhance the ability to hear sound from devices such as [mobile](#) phones, personal audio players and TVs, and effectively act as a hands-free headset.

Other less common situations include problems with the ear canal requiring an external bone anchored hearing aid (BAHA), and more profound hearing loss necessitating a body worn aid or a cochlear implant.

Some points to take note before one purchases a hearing aid?

- Have your ears and hearing checked by an ENT specialist, or an experienced general practitioner or audiologist to ensure there is no medical or surgical cause for the hearing loss.
- Your motivation to hear and communicate more clearly is more important than your level of hearing loss. If you need to hear clearly, even milder degrees of hearing loss can benefit from correction.
- Two hearing aids are often better than one, especially for age-related hearing loss. This ensures that both ears are working together (which is how they were designed!) and can result in clearer hearing.
- Bigger is often better. Although they are more bulky, BTE aids can give better amplification and less feedback, and are easier to handle than smaller ITE hearing aids.
- Hearing aids use sophisticated technology and can be expensive, so cost may also be a consideration. The hearing aid specialist can help you weigh all the factors to [choose](#) the right hearing aid.



A hearing [test](#).

Some points to take note after you purchase a hearing aid?

- Keep your hearing aid clean so that it does not cause infection or get blocked with ear wax.
- Learn how to change the battery and adjust settings like volume control. Some modern hearing aids can adjust automatically for hearing in specific situations such as in background noise.
- Work with the audiologist or hearing aid specialist to ensure that the hearing aid is comfortable and meeting your needs. The audiologist may need to tune and programme the hearing aid for optimal benefit.
- Hearing aid technology is moving ahead quite fast. As a rule of thumb, if you have not tried a hearing aid for two years, then you probably haven't tried a hearing aid! However, this need not mean that you must change your expensive hearing aid every two years. What is important is that it helps you communicate effectively. There is no fixed time period, but it is good to have it checked once or twice a year (like going to the dentist!). Generally speaking, hearing aids may need to be changed every four to five years.

What about caring for the hearing aid, are there some tips??

For behind the ear hearing aids, the ear mould may need to be soaked from time to time to keep it clean, but remember to keep the electronics dry; the electronic component should be wiped down with a tissue and stored in a dry box.

SIDEBOX: MORE THINGS TO TAKE NOTE

Agelessonline chats with Ronald Burgess, a consultant audiologist for Hearing Partners:

Can you share how much a hearing aid can cost?

- Entry-level digital aids – S\$800 to S\$2,200
- Mid-range digital hearing aids – S\$2000 to S\$3,600
- High-end digital hearing aids – S\$4,800 – S\$6,000
- Super-power digital hearing aids – S\$2,000 to S\$4,800

What does a hearing test entail?

Adults who suspect that they may have a hearing problem may make an appointment with us for a free non-obligatory hearing test. The test typically involves:

- History taking.
- Hearing assessment – lets him/her listen to a number of different pure tones through a pair of headphones.
- Hearing aid evaluation – this may involve a demo of the hearing aid suitably programmed to suit his/her hearing loss.

*(** PHOTO CREDIT: In-ear hearing aid, Jonas Bergsten; hearing test, provided by Hearing Partners)*

Online Link: <http://www.agelessonline.net/2796/choosing-the-right-hearing-aid/>