

YOUR VA HEARING AID GUIDE

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA San Diego Healthcare System

(REVISED 05/2020)

FORWARD

This document has been prepared to answer many common questions about using your V.A. issued hearing aids. This guide provides a general overview of hearing aids. There are numerous styles and options, therefore not everything in the guide will be relevant to your specific hearing aids. Please keep this information for future use. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Adjusting to hearing aid use is greatly improved by consistent and persistent use. Any time you have concerns or questions about your hearing aids or their use, we encourage you to contact us.

Hearing aids will be considered for replacement when the instrument proves to be ineffective, irreparable, or your medical condition has changed and a different device is needed. Devices may be replaced one time in a 3-year period if the item was destroyed or lost due to circumstances beyond your control.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR REASONABLE CARE IN USE OF YOUR HEARING AIDS. ABUSE MAY JEOPARDIZE YOUR ENTITLEMENT TO FUTURE REPLACEMENT.

V.A. SAN DIEGO HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

AUDIOLOGY SERVICE

(Updated 05/2020)

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AUDIOLOGY CLINIC CONTACT INFORMATION

 <h2>TELECARE</h2> <p>Call to request an appointment.</p> <p>LA JOLLA: 858-552-7564</p> <p>MISSION VALLEY: 619-400-5005</p> <p>OCEANSIDE: 760-643-2012</p> <p>CHULA VISTA: 619-476-6050</p>	 <h2>SECURE MESSAGING</h2> <p>Email us from your myHealththeVet account. A provider will respond within 72 hours.</p> <p>https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhy-portal-web/home</p> <p>Register for an account/log in using the green buttons in the top right corner. For information on setup/use of Secure Messaging, select "Messages".</p>
 <h2>VA VIDEO CONNECT</h2>  <p>Set up a video visit with your provider in a secure, virtual medical room using the camera on your phone, computer or tablet.</p> <p>You will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet or Wifi• Smartphone, computer with webcam, iPad, or tablet• Safe, secure and private location for your appointment• An active email account• For iPhone/iPad users: download VA Video Connect app found in the Apple app store <p>On the day of your appointment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In your email, find the message: <i>Please Join Your On-Demand VA Video Connect Visit</i>• Select the link <i>Click Here to Join the VA Video Connect Appointment</i> 5 minutes before your appointment• Enter your name, select <i>Connect</i>, then select <i>Start</i> to enter virtual medical room• Wait for your VA provider to join your for your visit	

All clinics will be closed in observance of Federal Holidays.

THE BASICS

You can tell the left from the right hearing aid by color. In-the-ear hearing aids will have colored writing on the shell. Behind-the-ear hearing aids will have a colored mark, normally on the battery door.

Red is for right

Blue is for left

Remember this by thinking "RR" or red-right

User Controls

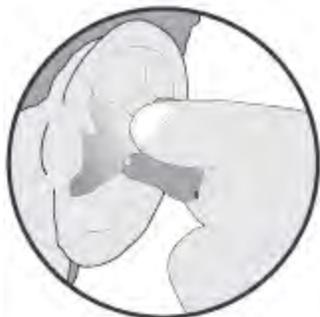
- Push button: _____
- Rocker Switch: _____
- Volume Wheel: _____

USE, CARE, & MAINTENANCE

INSERTION AND REMOVAL

IN-THE-EAR HEARING AIDS

Insertion



1



2

- A vent hole is located on the bottom of your hearing aid - this is a good way to help you identify the top from the bottom of your hearing aid.

- Hold the hearing aid with your thumb on the bottom (next to the vent hole) and your index (pointer) finger on the top.

- Go straight up to your ear – don't twist or turn your wrist or the hearing aid.

- Insert the canal portion and then press the hearing aid into place.

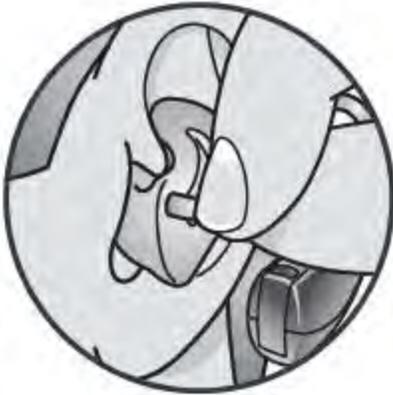
- Insertion is easier if you go straight up to the ear canal instead of twisting or turning the hearing aid.

Removal

- Grab a part of the hearing aid in your index finger. Normally it is easier to grab a part close to the back of the hearing aid.
- Once you have grabbed a part of the hearing aid you want to twist it forward toward your nose and then pull it out.
- You may have a removal filament (plastic line) to help to remove your hearing aid – if so just pull on the filament to remove your hearing aid.

Remember – to insert your hearing aid go straight into the ear and to remove it twist it forward.

BEHIND THE EAR HEARING AIDS



Insertion

- Insert the earmold first letting the hearing aid hang until the earmold is inserted.
- The vent hole is always on the bottom of the earmold. Put your thumb by the vent hole on the bottom of the earmold and your index (pointer) finger on the top of the earmold.
- Go straight into your ear canal – don't twist or turn the earmold or your wrist.
- Insert the canal piece and then press the rest of the earmold into place.
- Once the earmold is inserted completely, place the hearing aid up and over the ear. It will sit between your ear and head.



Removal

- Remove the hearing aid from behind your ear first by lifting it up and over your ear.
- To remove the earmold, grab a piece of the earmold with your index finger. It is normally easier to grab a part close to the back of the earmold.
- Once you have a piece of the earmold in your finger, twist the earmold toward your nose and then pull to remove it.

Remember – go straight into the ear canal when inserting your earmold and twist forward to remove it.

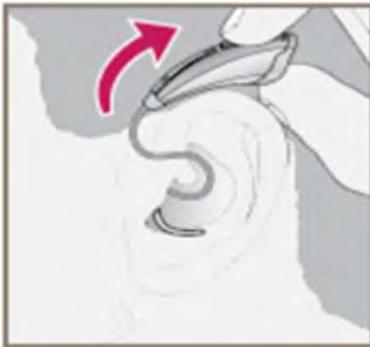
RIC WITH DOME

Insertion

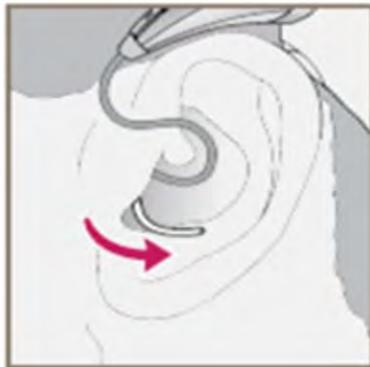


- Hold the tube where it attaches to the dome and gently push the dome into your ear canal

- Carefully place the hearing aid over the top of your ear



- Place the retention piece inside the bowl of your ear



Removal

- Grasp tube/wire by entrance of ear canal.

- Gently pull dome out of ear canal and remove hearing aid from behind your ear.

- DO NOT pull on top of tube/wire.



RIC WITH EARMOLD

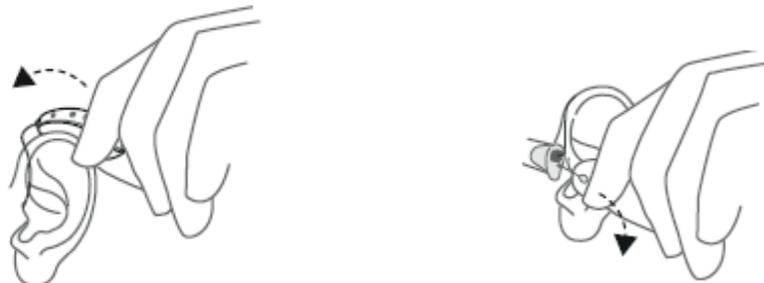
Insertion

- Hold the earmold between your thumb and index finger and position its sound outlet in your ear canal.
- Slide the earmold all the way into your ear with a gentle, twisting movement. Move the earmold up and down and gently press to place it correctly in the ear.
- Place the hearing aid behind your ear and make sure it sits firmly behind the ear.



Removal

- Lift the hearing aid from behind the ear. For a moment, let it hang beside your ear.
- Using your thumb and index finger, gently pull the earmold (not the hearing aid or the tubing) loose from the ear. If your earmold has a removal cord, use it. Remove the earmold completely by gently twisting it.



BATTERY INFORMATION

- Most hearing aids use zinc air or lithium ion batteries.
- Hearing aids will alert you by sending out a sound when the batteries need to be changed.
- Zinc air batteries: The sticker on your battery keeps it from draining. Once you remove the sticker, the battery will begin draining. After you have removed the battery sticker, allow the battery to sit for several minutes prior to inserting it in your hearing aid. This will fully activate the battery and give you a longer battery life.
 - Open the battery door at night (or when not wearing your hearing aids) to get the longest battery life possible.
 - Zinc air batteries are recyclable and should not be thrown in with regular trash.
 - You can contact the City of San Diego Household Hazardous Waste Transfer Facility for disposal information.
 - Use zip lock bags or a plastic container with a lid to store used batteries. You can store used batteries for up to one year and collect five pounds of used batteries prior to recycling.
 - According to manufacturer specifications, your batteries should last approximately _____ days.
- **Zinc air batteries are harmful if swallowed.** Store them at room temperature in a safe place away from children, pets or anyone who may mistake them for pills. If a battery or hearing aid is swallowed, see a doctor immediately and contact the National Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or National Battery Ingestion Hotline at 202-625-3333
- **Never swallow Lithium-ion batteries or place them in the ear or the nose as this may lead to serious injury or death in as little as 2 hours.** This can be due to chemical burn, which can cause permanent damage to the nose or ear or potentially lead to perforation of the inner organs. If a Lithium-ion battery is swallowed or placed in the ear or nose, seek emergency medical treatment immediately.

GENERAL CARE AND MAINTENANCE

- Keep hearing aids dry and keep them away from moisture.
- Keep the hearing aids clean.
- Do not expose the hearing aids to high heat.
- Avoid dropping the hearing aids.
- Use the hard and soft cases to protect your hearing aids.
- Don't use near hair spray.
- Keep spare batteries handy for zinc air batteries.
- Don't wear your hearing aids while sleeping.
- Keep safe from children and pets (dogs especially).
- Don't wear your hearing aids around hazardous noise – use hearing protection instead.
- If you wear BTE hearing aids you will need to have the tubing changed about every six months or when tubing becomes hard/brittle. Please contact our clinic for tubing changes (see page 3 for contact information).

CLEANING TECHNIQUE

- Daily cleaning of your hearing aids is **VERY IMPORTANT** for proper function.

- Wipe your hearing aids with a dry tissue when you remove them from your ears. Do not use alcohol or water to clean them.

- Check and clean your hearing aids at least once daily
 - **Loop** – use this tool to clean the sound opening of your hearing aid if your hearing aids do not have a wax filter. Put the loop in the sound opening **AT AN ANGLE** rather than going straight in. Going in at an angle will prevent damage to the hearing aid.

 - **Brush** – use the brush to clean any dirt from the microphone. You can also use the brush to clean the sound opening. Hold the hearing aid so the sound opening is facing the ground. Move the brush over the sound opening. With this method the dirt should drop out of the sound opening instead of going inside the hearing aid.

WAX FILTERS – Option 1

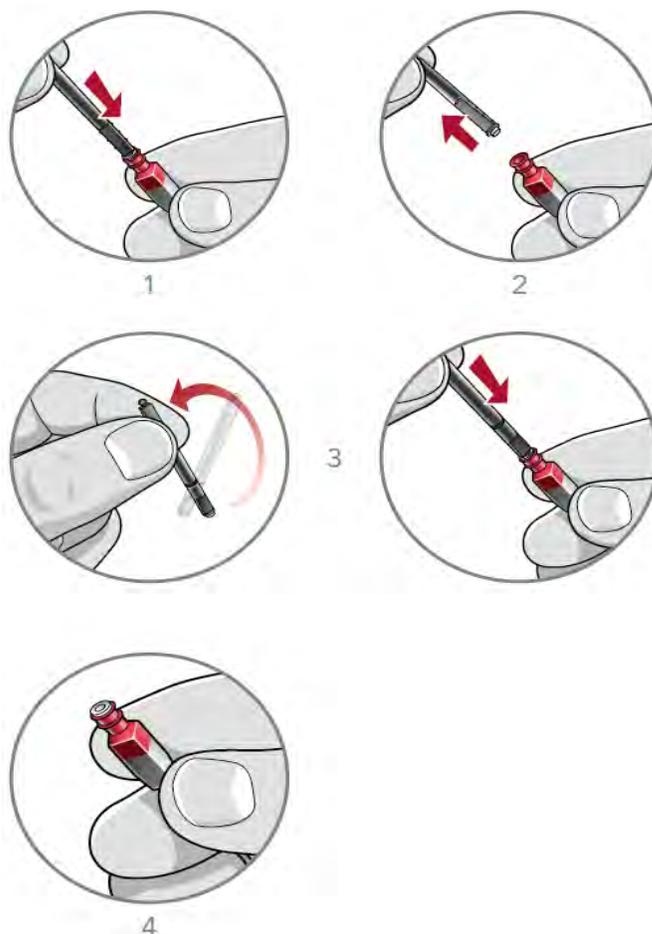
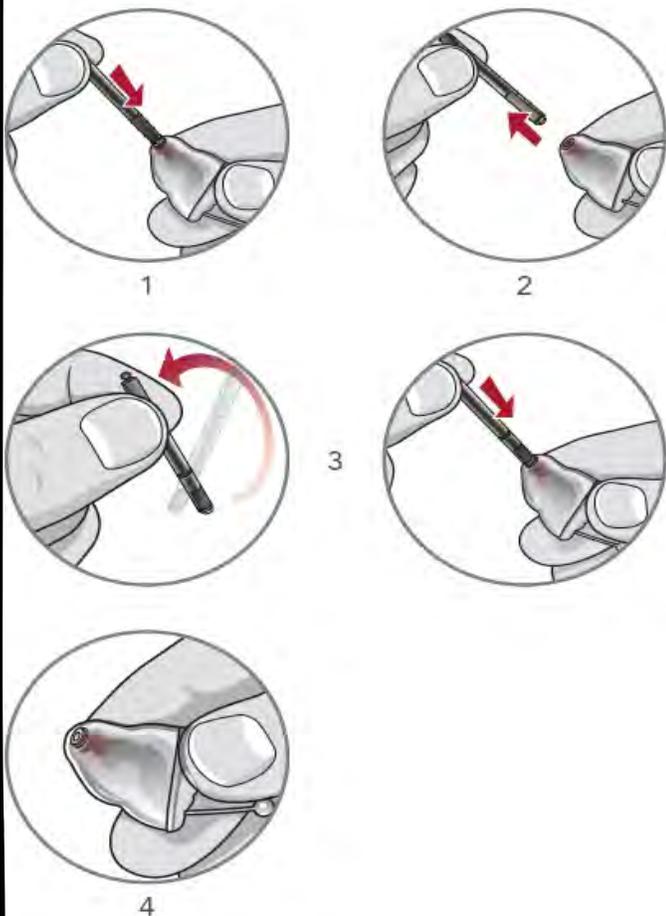
Starkey, GN ReSound, Signia, & Phonak custom earmolds/shells



Some hearing aids have small white filters that need changing (when dirty/plugged).
If the hearing aid sounds dead or weak, this is the **FIRST** thing you should try (along with changing the battery)

In-the-ear & Receiver-in-canal with earmold

Receiver-in-canal (once dome removed)



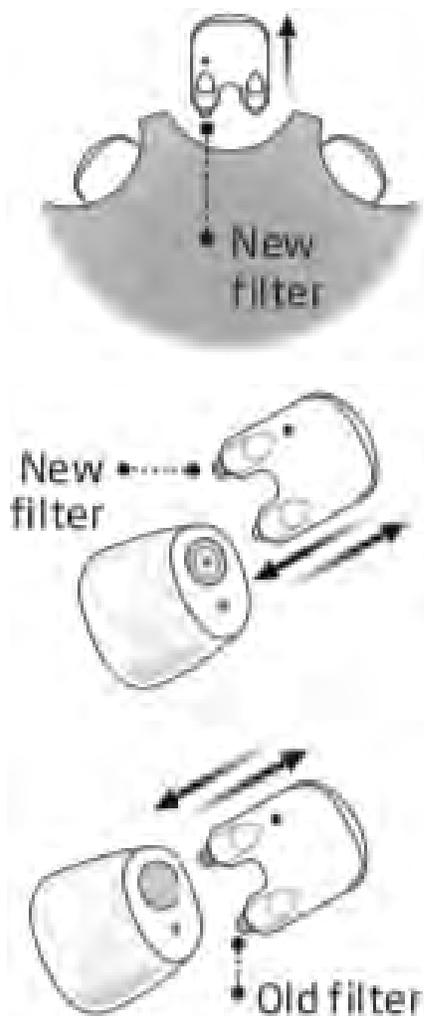
WAX FILTERS – Option 2

Oticon

Some hearing aids have small white filters that need changing (when dirty/plugged). If the hearing aid sounds dead or weak, this is the **FIRST** thing you should try (along with changing the battery)

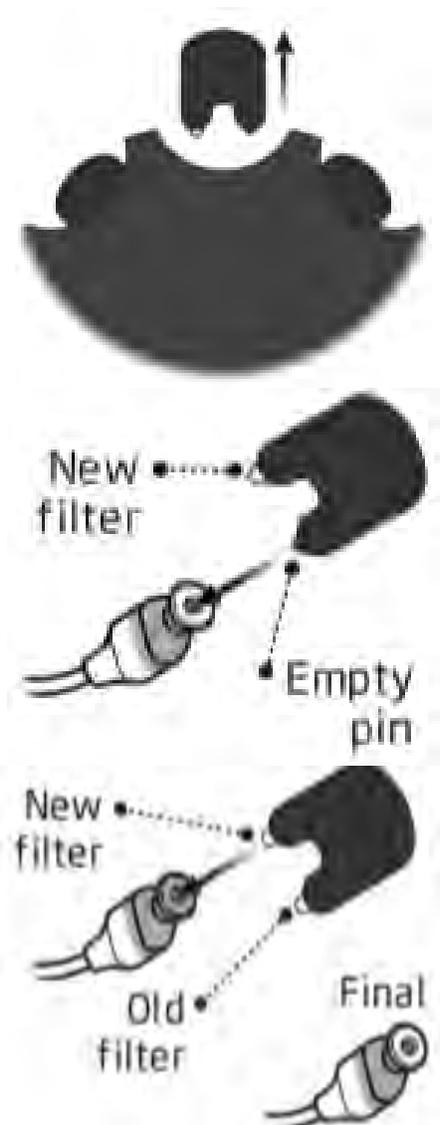
In-the-ear & Receiver-in-canal with earmold

ProWax System



Receiver-in-canal (once dome removed)

ProWax miniFit

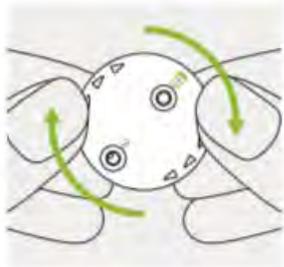


WAX FILTERS – Option 3

Phonak receivers



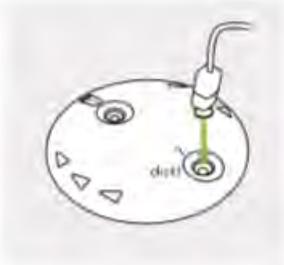
Remove the dome from the speaker by holding the speaker in one hand and the dome in the other. Gently pull off the dome to remove.



Place thumbs on grooves and gently rotate the Cerushield disk in the direction indicated by the arrows until a free opening appears under the trash bin icon and a new wax filter appears under the number 2.



To remove a used wax filter, carefully insert the speaker/wire into the opening under the trash bin icon until it clicks. Remove the speaker and you should see the old wax filter in the opening.



To insert a new wax filter, carefully insert the speaker into the opening under the number 2 until it clicks. Remove the speaker and the opening should now be empty. The new wax filter will be in the speaker.



Hold the speaker in one hand and the dome in the other. Slide the dome over the speaker.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

If your hearing aid stops working, try these things before calling us or coming to open access.

- Check the battery (try a new battery or recharge battery) and make sure the battery is placed correctly in your hearing aid.
- Check the volume control and any buttons/switches to be sure you are in the right program and at an adequate volume level.
- Be sure the sound opening is not blocked with wax or dirt.
- If your hearing aids utilize wax guards, try changing the wax guard (see pages 12-14).

If the hearing aid cuts in and out:

- Move the volume control and/or buttons/switches back and forth to clear any debris.
- Open and close the battery door several times in a row.

If the above steps have not resolved the issue, please contact the Audiology Clinic (see page 3 for contact information).

SUPPLY ORDERING INFORMATION

- If you utilize zinc air batteries, your first shipment of batteries will be sent to you automatically from the Denver Logistic Center (DLC). You will receive mail reordering instructions and a postcard order form with your initial battery shipment.
- It takes about three weeks to receive your batteries/supplies in the mail once they are ordered. Order batteries/supplies when you are down to a one-month supply. DLC will send a six-month supply of batteries with each order.
- There are several ways you can order your supplies through DLC:
 - You can utilize a postcard order form and mail it to DLC. You will receive a sample order form with your hearing aid information at your fitting appointment.
 - You can order your supplies online through the eBenefits website at: www.ebenefits.va.gov. You must first apply for a premium level account through the eBenefits website. Once you are logged in as a premium user, select “apply for benefits” and go to the “health” subcategory. You can then click on “order hearing aid batteries & prosthetic socks” to order batteries.
 - You can order supplies by phone utilizing DLC’s 24-hour automated phone system. Call 303-273-6200 and follow the prompts. You will be prompted to press “1” to use the automated reorder system. You will be prompted to enter your social security number and verify your mailing zip code to place your order. You can also speak to a representative to order batteries or other supplies by pressing “2” at the prompt.

My hearing aids supplies: Wax filters _____
Domes _____
Batteries _____
Other _____

HEARING AID FEEDBACK (WHISTLING)

NORMAL FEEDBACK OR WHISTLING

This type of whistling can happen when:

- the hearing aids are turned on when you insert or remove them
- the microphone is covered (e.g. by your hand)
- the volume control is turned up too high
- you are too close to a solid surface
- there are extreme body movements (i.e. bending over)

ABNORMAL FEEDBACK OR WHISTLING

This type of whistling can happen when:

- you are talking, chewing or laughing
- before you have reached a comfortable volume level
- the hearing aid fits too loosely in the ear

TELEPHONE USE

**When not streaming through Bluetooth*

- There are several ways to successfully utilize the telephone with your hearing aids. Most hearing aids have an automatic phone feature and do not require an additional program for phone use.
- Following are general instructions for the automatic phone feature:
 - Hold the phone receiver near the hearing aid until you find the "sweet spot" where you hear best.
 - If you use a BTE hearing aid, you need to hold the phone receiver near the microphone (above your ear).
 - If you do hear feedback, attach a telephone magnet to the phone receiver (magnet available through the Audiology clinic).
 - When the call is complete, hang up the phone. The hearing aid will automatically go back to your previous listening program.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

HEARING AIDS:

- Will not restore hearing to "normal." Hearing aids are basically amplifiers – that means they make sounds louder but not always clearer.
- Will not necessarily make hearing in noise clearer. Remember hearing aids will amplify both speech and noise. Most people with "normal" hearing have difficulty hearing in noise also.
- Will help in understanding speech. Hearing aids, along with good communication strategies, can help you to understand speech in many everyday listening situations.
- Will help to overcome frustration, embarrassment in trying to understand.
- Will decrease effort and stress.

*****The biggest secret to successful hearing aid use is to wear your hearing aids full time!!!*****

TIPS FOR EASIER COMMUNICATION **(LISTENER)**

- Use your hearing aids full time!!
- Stop what you are doing and look at the speaker – concentration is very important. What you see can add important information to what you hear.
- Use good lighting.
- Reduce noise in your environment to hear speech better:
 - o Turn down/off noise (TV, radio, etc.)
 - o Move closer to speaker, farther from noise
 - o Go to a quieter location
- Confirm important details – repeating what you think you heard can prevent problems later on.
- Admit if you don't understand - ask questions or have speaker rephrase – avoid saying "huh?" Pretending you understand when you don't is a "no win" situation.

TIPS FOR EASIER COMMUNICATION **(SPEAKER)**

- Be in the same room
- Get the hearing aid wearer's attention first
- Wait until the hearing aid wearer is looking at you
- Speak slowly and clearly, but don't shout.
- Keep your face and mouth visible
- Use gestures
- Reduce noise
- Rephrase rather than repeat if you are not understood

EXTRA COMMUNICATION TIPS

RESTAURANTS

- Do not sit near the kitchen
- Go where there is soft music or no music
- Go to restaurants with fewer tables
- Avoid popular eating times when restaurants are more crowded and noisy
- Think soft – select restaurants with drapes, carpet and fewer windows
- Rest up before you go
- Remember – the closer you are to the speaker the louder they are compared to noise
- Tell others about your hearing loss and make suggestions on ways to improve communication

GROUP MEETINGS

- Arrive early in order to select the best possible seat
- Choose your seat in order to see and hear the speaker
- Obtain a copy of the agenda and read it prior to the start of the meeting
- After the meeting starts if you find you have chosen a poor seat, move to a better spot
- Ask about the use of assistive listening devices prior to the meeting
- Ask a friend to attend the meeting with you and jot down key words if you lose the trend of the meeting
- Encourage the use of name tags

EXTRA COMMUNICATION TIPS

COMMUNICATING IN THE CAR

Communicating in the car can be very difficult even with hearing aids because: 1) road/background noise is very loud compared with speech; 2) motor noises tend to muffle soft consonant sounds; 3) speaker is not facing the listener. To improve communicating in the car:

- Do not use the radio, sun roof or fan
- Keep the window on your side rolled up
- If you are the driver and wear two hearing aids, turn off the left aid
- If you are the passenger turn off the hearing aid closest to the window
- Sit in the front seat if you are trying to communicate
- Conversation in the car may be dangerous if you rely heavily on speechreading. You may need to avoid conversation altogether and may need to explain this beforehand to passengers.
- Use assistive listening devices

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Many times hearing impaired listeners answer questions incorrectly because they do not understand what is being asked. There are two effective ways to deal with questions that facilitate communication:

1. Repeat or rephrase as much of the question as you can, asking if you heard correctly. For example: "Where did you spend Christmas?" "Did you ask where I went for Christmas?" Your response calls for a yes or no answer – this will let the listener know if you understood the question.
2. Repeat enough of the question in your answer that the listener will know if you understood. For example: "Do you take cream in your coffee?" "Yes, I would like cream please." Again, this will allow the listener to know if there is a misunderstanding.

CLEAR SPEECH TECHNIQUES

Although hearing aid technology has become more advanced, hearing aids still can't restore hearing to normal. Clear speech techniques can be used by family and friends to make it easier for a hearing-impaired person to hear speech. One recent study showed using clear speech techniques can increase speech understanding by up to 40%.

How can you help your loved ones to learn to speak more clearly? Simply ask them to do four things when communicating with you:

- Slow down their speech a bit
- Speak a tiny bit louder
- Say things as clearly as possible without exaggerating their mouth movements
- Pause at meaningful places so that your ears can catch up with their mouths

For example:

"My husband's sister is coming to visit us in April."

Utilizing pauses (as well as speaking slower and slightly louder):

"My husband's sister (pause) is coming to visit us (pause) in April."

Although clear speech is easy to produce, it can be difficult to break old speaking habits. You may need to develop a reminder system until clear speech techniques become a habit.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES

There are other devices you can use to help you hear better besides your hearing aids. These are known as assistive listening devices (ALDs). Some of these devices include: infrared television headsets, FM systems, special smoke detectors and amplified telephones. There are also accessories for your cell phone available to make them "hands free." ALD's are amplifiers that bring sound directly into the ear and generally amplify just the speaker and not the "noise."

As a person with hearing impairment, you are entitled to services under the Americans with Disability Act. When you are in public places you can ask if these services are available to you. Theatres and playhouses normally have ALDs available for patrons. California also provides free amplified telephones to hearing-impaired residents. Please see your audiologist for more information.

Below is the international symbol denoting that a public building can assist persons with hearing loss. Look for this at movie theatres, playhouses, meeting halls, auditoriums, airports, hotels/motels, etc. in order to receive assistive devices.



(d)
International Symbol of Access for Hearing Loss

Fig. 43
International Symbols

HEARING AID FOLLOW UP

Someone from Audiology will be contacting you in about 30 days to ask you questions about how you are doing with your new hearing aids. This will take about 10-15 minutes of your time and will help us to assess whether an in-person visit is needed to make changes to the fit or programming of your new hearing aids. Please ensure that we have your current contact information on file before you leave the clinic today.

We will be asking you questions regarding the fit and performance of your hearing aids. This follow up is a very important part of the hearing aid fitting process, as it will allow us to assess whether further modifications or changes are needed to help you to get the most from your hearing aids. We want you to be a successful hearing aid user!!!

It may be helpful for you to take some notes during the first month of wearing your new hearing aids, particularly if there are any questions you have regarding the care or use of your hearing aids or any difficulties you are experiencing.

If you are having any difficulty with the fit or use of your new hearing aids, please feel free to contact the clinic **PRIOR** to your 30-day follow up, so we can address any problems that may prevent you from wearing your hearing aids.

Also, please look over the IOI-HA form on the following page after utilizing your hearing aids ~30 days. We will be asking for your responses to this survey during our follow up.

Your hearing aids have a 180-day trial period. We are only able to change the style, model or manufacturer of your hearing aids during this trial period. The end date of your trial period is printed on your battery information form. Please contact the Audiology clinic within your trial period if you feel you need to change the style, model or manufacturer of your hearing aids.

Audiology and Speech Pathology Service

Outcome Measures Questionnaire IOI-HA

Name (please print): _____ Last 4 of SSN: _____
Completion date (mm/dd/yy): _____ Method of entry: Return Mail

Please select the best answer to each question in regards to your most recently issued hearing aids.

1. Think about how much you used your present hearing aid(s) over the last two weeks. On an average day, how many hours did you use the hearing aid(s)?

None Less than 1 hour per day 1 to 4 hours per day 4-8 hours per day More than 8 hours per day

2. Think about the situation where you most wanted to hear better, before you got your present hearing aid(s). Over the past two weeks, how much has the hearing aid helped in those situations?

Not at all Slightly Moderately Quite a lot Very much

3. Think again about the situation where you most wanted to hear better. When you use your present hearing aid(s), how much difficulty do you still have in that situation?

Very much Quite a lot Moderate Slight None

4. Considering everything, do you think your present hearing aid(s) is worth the trouble?

Not at all Slightly Moderately Quite a lot Very much

5. Over the past two weeks, with your present hearing aid(s), how much have your hearing difficulties affected the things you can do?

Very much Quite a lot Moderately Slightly Not at all

6. Over the past two weeks, with your present hearing aid(s), how much do you think other people were bothered by your hearing difficulties?

Very much Quite a lot Moderately Slightly Not at all

7. Considering everything, how much has your present hearing aid(s) changed your enjoyment of life.

Worse Not at all Slightly better Quite a lot better Very much better

8. How much hearing difficulty do you have when you are not wearing a hearing aid?

Severe Moderately severe Moderate Mild None

MANUFACTURER CUSTOMER SUPPORT **INFORMATION**

VA Specific Phone Numbers/Websites for Patient Technical Support:

Oticon 855-400-9766
**24/7
Website: <https://www.oticon.com/support>

Phonak 866-230-0110
**support provided 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (Central time)
Website: <https://www.phonak.com/us/en/support/product-support.html>

Resound 1-888-735-4327
**support provided 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (Central time)
Website: <https://www.resound.com/en-us/help>

Signia/Siemens 1-800-350-6093
**support provided 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. (Eastern time)
Website: <https://veterans.signiausa.com/home/help-for-veterans-military/how-to-videos/>

Starkey 1-800-211-7789
**support provided 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. (Central time)
Website: <https://www.starkey.com/hearing-aid-use-and-care/instructional-videos>

HEARING AID ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

- Clinic contact information
- Right / Left
- On / Off
- Review of any manual controls
- Insertion / Removal
- Battery replacement / charging
- Cleaning and troubleshooting
- Wax management (e.g., filter changing, tube cleaning)
- Supply ordering
- Normal / Abnormal feedback
- Telephone use (mobile and/or landline)
- Realistic expectations and limitations
- Communication strategies and considerations
- Follow up in 30 days
- Manufacturer support (if available)
- Trial period and warranty