

EAR, NOSE & THROAT

AIDS FOR HEARING LOSS

Whatever your type of hearing loss, there is likely to be a hearing aid suitable to overcome it.



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The leading cause of a sensorineural type of hearing loss (HL) is age-related hearing loss, which affects about half the population over the age of 60. Accelerated HL is due to noisy lifestyles, ear infections, middle ear and hearing nerve tumours, genetic and autoimmune conditions, as well as drugs and chemo-radiation toxicity.

Conductive HL can be due to ear canal narrowing or absence, infections, ear wax, eardrum perforation, middle ear bone disease or tumour. Central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) HL is a condition where there is normal hearing, but the sound information is not decoded normally by the brain's hearing centre. Patients pass the hearing test, but still cannot hear well, especially if there is noise, multiple speakers or distractions. CAPD is often missed by even doctors and will need specialised CAPD testing; if not identified early, kids do poorly in school while adults suffer from poor listening and comprehension skills or miscommunication issues, even with hearing aids.

Many adults ignore their HL as they can still hear. However, they cannot discriminate speech well, straining to hear and lip-read, especially in noisy situations — there is usually increased misunderstandings, and reduced job and socialisation options. HL causes depression, increases falls as well as a three- to five-fold increase in memory loss or dementia. The hearing brain shrinks with reduced sound stimulation over the years, and when hearing

is aided much later, the hearing outcomes are poorer.

There is a hearing option for everyone: available now are sophisticated and cosmetic multidirectional microphones, with options for noise-cancellation, wind-noise reduction and tinnitus rehabilitation. Many patients buy aids over the counter or internet, but it is crucial to first exclude diseases and tumours, and consider after-sales support. The most cosmetic aid may not be powerful enough, and the most expensive aid may not be suitable.

At our centre, our doctor and audiologists take a lot of time to let patients try out different brands and models of hearing aids, and tailor an aid specifically for a patient's hearing loss, which will evolve with time and medical conditions. Surgeries to insert bone-anchored or cochlear implants, or microtia reconstruction are sometimes required. Having the full range of treatment options explained and available is needed to optimise the hearing benefits. 

