

This is printed as part of a series of occasional papers produced by Birmingham Tinnitus Group presenting a variety of viewpoints to offer information and support for our members. We would like to thank Julie Armstrong and David Ormerod for their help.

HOW DO I GET A HEARING AID?

If you think you might need to try a hearing aid, the first step is to see your GP. He will refer you to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Doctor or an Audiologist at your local hospital.

At your appointment your ears will be checked and you will be asked some questions about your hearing. You will also have a hearing test to see if your hearing is at a level that would benefit from a hearing aid.

The audiologist will discuss your hearing test and hearing difficulties and advise you about hearing aids. Not all people who come for a hearing test will benefit from a hearing aid, but advice can be given about other services that may help you.

If you decide to try hearing aids, impressions of your ears will be taken so ear moulds can be made. You will then be sent an appointment to return to have the hearing aids programmed and fitted. These hearing aids are provided free of charge on a loan basis. Even if you might benefit from hearing aids, some people choose not to try one. If you change your mind at a later date, your GP will need to refer you back to the clinic.

Because the range of hearing aids offered by the NHS is limited, some people prefer to buy a private hearing aid. If you choose this option, ensure you go to a registered hearing aid dispenser and avoid buying from one off exhibitions, people selling at the door and through advertisements. Some dispensers commit themselves to comply with the Code of Practice of the professional society and may use the initials MSHAA or FSHAA if they pass the society fellowship exam. Look out for these initials after the dispenser's name.

The Hearing Service Centre on Western Road, Birmingham offers a full range of NHS services. Also located within the centre is a registered hearing aid dispenser, who works for David Ormerod Hearing Aid Specialists Ltd. This service meets the standards set by the Hearing Aid Council Act, 1968. Similar services may be available in your local hospital.

If you require any further information, please contact any of the following:

Hearing Services Centre, Western Road, Birmingham B18 7QQ Tel:0121 507 4875

David Ormerod Hearing Aids, Hearing Services Centre, Western Road, Birmingham B 18 7QQ Tel: 0 121 523 5444

ENT & Hearing Services, Heartlands Hospital, Bordesley Green East, Birmingham B9 5SS Tel: 0121 424 0888

Audiology Suite, Lyng Centre for Health and Social Care, Frank Fisher Way, West Bromwich, B70 7AW Tel: 0 121 612 23 66

Hearing Assessment & Rehabilitation Centre, Selly Oak Hospital, Raddlebarn Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6JD tel: 0121 627 8106

NHS Hearing Aids

The NHS issues digital hearing aids to those patients who are suitable, which proves to be the majority of the people seen. If you are not suitable for a digital hearing aid, the NHS will issue you with a hearing aid that will provide you with the maximum benefit.

If you have a hearing loss in both ears and no other ear problems, you will be offered a hearing aid for each ear. This will help you to locate sounds more easily and hear better in noisy situations. The aids are programmed according to your hearing loss to provide the appropriate volume for you.

The introduction of digital hearing aids is a positive step forward for hearing aid users. The NHS are able to provide up to three programmes on most aids and there are special features to help prevent feedback.

Digital hearing aids do not prevent background noise being amplified; however, one programme may be utilised to make listening in a noisy situation more comfortable. It takes time to adjust to any hearing aid and determination is required in the early stages.

Your hearing aids are provided on loan from the NHS. If they stop working they will be replaced. Batteries, repairs and appointments are free of charge on the NHS.

The waiting time to get a hearing aid varies from clinic to clinic. Home visits can be arranged but only for people who are totally housebound and unable to attend the clinic by any means. A doctor's referral is required for this service. If you have any questions about the service offer, please contact your local audiology centre.

Private Hearing Aids

The hearing test and assessment should be undertaken by a registered hearing aid dispenser. All dispensers must abide by the Hearing Aid Council Code of Practice. The standards and activities of the private dispenser are regulated by the Hearing Aid Council.

Private hearing aids are expensive items to purchase (about £500 +) and the repair service may also be costly. Hearing aid batteries will also have to be purchased. The range of private hearing aids is comprehensive, and many of the models now available are in-the-ear types which are especially made for each individual's ear and hearing specifications.

Hearing tests and examinations should involve the customer in no obligation of any kind. They are usually available free of charge, even when conducted in the home. The dispenser should refer the customer to their doctor concerning any condition of the ear(s) which requires medical attention.

If a hearing aid is recommended, written particulars are provided and even after a product has been ordered there are a number of opportunities for the customer to change their mind at no cost. Some companies offer a 30 day free trial service. Check before you purchase.

Supportive aftercare may be provided by registered dispensers; this can be at the practice or in the comfort of the user's home, at no extra charge. Check beforehand if this available.

A final point to make is, while the aid is away for repair or servicing unless he/she has a reserve, the user can often be without an aid.

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