



**British Tinnitus Association** - Registered Charity No: 1011145

# How do I get a Hearing Aid?

This information sheet was written by the **Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group**  
Registered Charity Number 1055001

**Written with the help of Mark Hassell Senior Audiologist and David Ormerod a private supplier who we thank for their kind support.**

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If you think you might need to try a hearing aid, the first step is to see your GP. He/she 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 later change your mind, 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 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.

## **NHS Hearing Aids**

NHS hearing aids are behind-the-ear style hearing aids. In-the-ear hearing aids are not issued by the NHS but can be purchased from a private hearing aid dispenser.

The NHS issues digital hearing aids to those patients who are suitable, which proves to be the majority of the people we see. If you are not suitable for a digital hearing aid, you will be issued 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 noise 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. We 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. Any hearing aid takes time to adjust to 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 house bound and unable to come to the clinic at all. 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 is 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, a statutory body established by the Hearing Aid Act 1968.

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.

Some models are pre-programmed for a number of environments in which the user will regularly find themselves. Some are adjusted via a remote control unit. Others adjust themselves automatically to the most suitable setting, and may help to discriminate between sound and background noise.

Hearing tests and examinations are undertaken and involve the customer in no obligation of any kind; they are usually available free of charge, even when conducted in the home. Free domiciliary visiting services are available to customers who choose to be assessed in their home environment.

The dispenser will 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.

While the aid is away for repair or servicing the user can often be without an aid.

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**This information is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP / medical professional**

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