



How do I get a Hearing Aid?

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

(With thanks Julie Armstrong and David Ormerod for their help).

Many people ask the question
'How do I get a hearing aid?'

First, you must see your doctor who may refer you for a hearing test at a Hearing Aid Clinic or for an appointment with an ENT Consultant at a local hospital. The Consultant and Audiology staff will assess your need for a hearing aid. If one is needed, you will be offered a suitable NHS hearing aid, provided FREE, on a loan basis. The alternative choice is to buy your own hearing aid through a registered hearing aid dispenser.

If you decide not to have a hearing aid at that time, you can always ask your doctor to refer you back to the Hearing Aid clinic at a later date. Many people get help from environmental aids - television amplifiers, louder phones, flashing light door bells etc, communication tactics and lipreading.

Ask at the Hearing Aid clinic to see the Hearing Therapist. You do not have to have a hearing aid to get this help. Further on are listed some of the advantages and disadvantages of NHS and private hearing aids.

In making your choice remember these things... if you decide to have a hearing aid, bear these four points in mind:

- A hearing aid, no matter what type, cannot restore natural hearing, whatever the advertisements say.
- If you have a hearing problem, it is best to see your doctor for medical advice.
- If you have never had a hearing aid, it is recommended that you first see your doctor and have an NHS hearing aid, to get used to using a hearing aid. If you choose to purchase a private hearing aid at a later date, the experience of using the NHS aid will assist you in gaining maximum benefit from your purchase. Also you have the NHS aid as a second/reserve aid.
- If you choose to purchase a private hearing aid, please ensure you go to a Registered Hearing Aid Dispenser who is locally based and well established, rather than buying a hearing aid through an advertisement or one-off exhibition.

We advise against admitting canvassers who call without an appointment, and ensure that you are not alone if an appointment is arranged. Some registered hearing aid dispensers may commit themselves to comply with the code of practice of their professional society and members may use the initials MSHAA or FSHAA if they pass the society fellowship examination. It is advisable to look out for these initials after the dispenser's name.

What is the difference between NHS and Private Hearing Aids?

NHS Hearing Aids

The medical and technical professions work together as a team to provide on-going hearing aid management for the individual patient. The NHS hearing aid(s) is supplied free on a loan basis. The earmoulds, batteries, repairs and advice are also free as an on-going service. If your hearing changes, you will be re-assessed and the appropriate aid(s) provided.

The patient is provided with a hearing aid(s) appropriate for their hearing loss, and these are carefully selected from a wide range of hearing aid models to cater for their needs. The NHS range of hearing aids all have a Telecoil (T) switch which can be used with the loop facility. Some of the NHS hearing aid models come in a range of 3 colours, beige, grey and brown.

A comprehensive range of earmoulds is available including non-allergic materials. The range of NHS hearing aids is regularly reviewed to provide new technology which includes hearing aids with Direct Audio Input, High

Frequency Emphasis, Automatic Gain Control (AGC), MT Combined switch etc.

All audiology staff adhere to standards set by the British Society of Audiology and the British Association of Audiology Technicians.

A full range of rehabilitation services is provided by the Hearing Therapist and professional advice is available from the audiology and medical Staff, for both patient and their family.

Hearing aids provided on the NHS are individually selected on the basis of medical and technical need and not necessarily what the patient would like cosmetically. Of the hearing aid types available on the NHS, the most commonly fitted are post aural (behind the ear) models. Other hearing aid types available are: spectacle aids, in the ear, in the canal and body worn aids, but these are only provided where a medical/technical need has been identified.

Some hearing aid clinics/ENT departments have varied waiting times. Patients are normally seen at the Hearing Aid Centre, but home visits are available for the housebound. When an aid requires repair, a replacement one will be offered.

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 +). The repair service and replacement batteries may also be costly. While the aid is away for repair or servicing the user can often be without an aid.

The range of private hearing aids is comprehensive, and many of the models now available are in the ear types, 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. Free domiciliary visiting services are available to customers who choose to be assessed in their home environment. Hearing tests and examinations are

undertaken and involve the customer in no obligation of any kind; they are available free of charge, even when conducted in the home. 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.

Some hearing aid companies offer renting a private hearing aid as an alternative to purchasing the aid outright. Again, ask if this is available.

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.

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

The British Tinnitus Association

Ground Floor, Unit 5, Acorn Business Park,
Woodseats Close, Sheffield, S8 0TB

Registered Charity no: 1011145

Freephone: **0800 018 0527**

Tel: 0114 250 9933 Fax: 0114 258 2279

Call at local rate on: 0845 4500 321

Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk

Website: www.tinnitus.org.uk

