

From Health & Wellness Magazine

## **Choosing the right hearing aid**

Hearing aids have come a long way since the days of sticking a megaphone to your ear. Today, there are a variety of hearing-aid choices for those who suffer hearing loss. Learning about the choices and understanding the pros and cons of each can help make the process of selecting the right device less overwhelming. The Mayo Clinic Web site, [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com), separates the alternatives into two categories, style and technology.

### **Hearing-aid styles**

These are four of the most common styles of hearing aids, varying in size, power, effectiveness, and cost.

- **Completely-in-the-canal (CIC).** Effective for mild to moderate hearing loss, this style is the smallest of the options, fits inside the ear canal, and is the least noticeable. However, due to the small size, battery life is shortened, which drives up the ongoing costs.
- **In-the-canal (ITC).** Slightly larger than the CIC, the ITC fits partially in the ear canal and is for people with mild to moderately severe hearing loss. It is more visible but can accommodate a larger range of settings than the CIC.
- **In-the-ear (ITE).** This is the most common hearing aid. Designed for adults with mild to severe hearing loss, the ITE is larger than the CIC and ITC. Its size makes it more powerful and easy to adjust.
- **Behind-the-ear (BTE).** The largest and most powerful of these four options, the BTE power source is behind the ear. It is appropriate for all levels of hearing loss and is easiest to adjust.

### **Hearing-aid technology**

There are three options in technology:

- **Basic analog** is the simplest and least expensive hearing aid. The rate of sound amplification is set and can only be changed by an audiologist. To accommodate changes in surrounding noise, it is necessary to manually adjust the volume on the unit.\*
- **Programmable analog** is programmed by an audiologist to automatically adjust to varying types of sound and volume.\*
- **Digital** The most sophisticated of the options, the digital unit contains a computer chip which responds to the sounds it receives and automatically adjusts the output of amplification based on that information. Prices vary depending on those levels.

\*Although both analog versions are on the market, they are being phased out. "The majority of hearing instruments sold today are digital," says Jason Hombach, Marketing Specialist for Starkey Laboratories. "Most manufacturers are not developing analog or programmable analog instruments. They're basically legacy products like VCRs. You can still buy them, but the technology is outdated."

### **Customizing your hearing aid**

Use the following accessories to customize your hearing aid:

- **Directional microphones** help with background noise. They are oriented to receive sounds directly in front of you, thus reducing noises coming from other directions.
- **Telephone adapters**, when paired with a compatible phone, enhance hearing-aid effectiveness during phone use. The adapter eliminates background noise by transmitting only telephone sounds.
- **Multi-memory technology** enables you to use different pre-programmed listening settings in a variety of environments. This choice is best for people with more demanding hearing requirements.

- Bluetooth technology is for behind-the-ear units only. This ear level instrument (ELI) is new from Starkey Laboratories. It uses Bluetooth technology to provide clearer signals during mobile-phone use. ELI directs the telephone signal through the hearing aid, resulting in less interference and frustration.

For some people with moderate to severe nerve hearing loss, a hearing aid surgically implanted behind the ear may be an option. There are always risks associated with surgery, but an audiologist can help you determine if surgery is right for you.

Choosing the right hearing aid requires consultation with an audiologist. Once you have made your selection but before you buy, make sure there is a trial period with your hearing aid. And then congratulate yourself for making a decision that will help you stay connected to the people in your life