

Adjusting to life with hearing aids

Helping patients know what to expect from assistive technology

By Dana Jacobson, AuD,
Co-President and Co-CEO,
Associated Audiologists, Inc.



For patients with hearing loss, the first step is getting them to see an audiologist for a comprehensive hearing evaluation. But the next step—adjusting to life with hearing aids—is much more nuanced than simply purchasing a device and switching it on.

Patients often have high expectations regarding the first few days, weeks and months of wearing prescription hearing aids. They may think that the moment they put on a device that all their hearing problems will disappear, and their hearing will be perfectly restored.

In our practice, we have observed that the average person needs about 30 days to get used to wearing prescription hearing aids for the first time. And while the benefits are many—including improvements across social, emotional, mental and physical health—nothing will ever be quite the same as normal hearing.

In this issue, we've included guidance on how clinicians can:

- Encourage patients with hearing loss to see an audiologist for a comprehensive hearing evaluation.
- Provide realistic expectations on the benefits and limits of assistive technology.



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- Interact more effectively with patients with hearing loss.

Why hearing health matters

The average person waits seven years after they first notice signs of hearing loss to get tested. It's one of those health issues that is easy to procrastinate because it doesn't feel as urgent—but research shows that left untreated, hearing loss contributes to decreased heart, neurological and mental health, especially in older adults.

A comprehensive hearing evaluation from an audiologist can provide a helpful baseline of the patient's hearing health.

We can also assess and address concerns of tinnitus, dizziness and balance in patients, whether or not they have hearing concerns.

If you have a patient experiencing hearing loss, tinnitus or balance problems, our providers at Associated Audiologists, Inc. would be happy to work with them.

Diagnosis: Hearing Loss

Most patients aren't surprised to receive a diagnosis of hearing loss. However, they may not know what options are available to them. Prescription hearing aids provide amplification, and as technology continually improves, devices are better able to filter out

background noise from speech and other more relevant sounds.

However, each individual will need time to adjust. For example, if they have not heard the sound of the air conditioner register for five years, it may be overwhelming to hear it again. Given time, their brain will learn to filter that sound out of their conscious awareness.

Successful use of prescription hearing aids takes time and patience. That's part of why we spend so much time fitting and fine-tuning each patient's hearing aids once they arrive. We will do our best to set them up for success and minimize the amount of effort it takes on their part. Encourage your patients to find a provider they feel comfortable with. The journey towards success is easier with a strong patient/provider relationship.

Adjusting to life with hearing aids

- If patients are experiencing difficulty or frustration with their new hearing aids, reassure them that like any major change, it's expected that it will take time to adjust. To help with acclimation, patients should:
- **Wear their new hearing aids consistently.** It's ok to take breaks, but the more they wear their devices, the faster they will adjust.
 - **Try many different environments.** The sound of their own voice, the experience of having a one-on-one conversation, and the process of listening in a crowded environment will all be new.

- **Rest at the end of the day.** Most patients are ready to take their hearing aids out and reduce their sensory input after a full day of use. That's expected and encouraged early on in using hearing aids.

Effective communication with hearing aid users

Team members in your practice can use the following suggestions to communicate more effectively with people who are hard of hearing.

- Visually get the patient's attention before beginning to speak.
- Sit or stand in front of the patient so they can see your face clearly.
- Speak slowly and distinctly—not just loudly. Most hearing aid users simply need a little more time to process what you said.
- Try rephrasing if the patient is having difficulty understanding you.
- Use written directions to reinforce verbal instructions.

Introducing Lenire—A treatment device proven in large-scale clinical trial to reduce severity of tinnitus

Lenire is a device that uses bimodal neuromodulation to reduce the severity of tinnitus. It delivers mild pulses to the tongue combined with sound played through headphones to help the patient's brain pay less attention to tinnitus. Together, the sounds and pulses work to retrain neural pathways and reduce the impact of tinnitus on daily life.



Susan Smittkamp, AuD, PhD, Clinic Manager at the Shawnee Mission Associated Audiologists clinic, is a tinnitus and sound sensitivity specialist and Lenire trained provider. She can offer a comprehensive tinnitus assessment and recommend a tinnitus management plan for patients with moderate to severe tinnitus.

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About Associated Audiologists, Inc.

Associated Audiologists is the region's leader in audiologic care for hearing loss, tinnitus/sound sensitivity and vestibular disorders. The practice has eight clinics conveniently located in Overland Park, Shawnee Mission, Prairie Village, Leavenworth, Manhattan and Lawrence in Kansas; and Kansas City and Independence in Missouri. Each clinic is staffed by doctoral-level audiologists who utilize state-of-the-art technology to assess and diagnose hearing loss.

Stacey Baldwin, AuD, Co-President and Co-CEO; Dana Jacobson, AuD, Co-President and Co-CEO; Lisa Battani, AuD; Danielle Dorner, AuD; Linda Erickson, AuD; Abigail Kelly, AuD; Dave Nissen, AuD; David Paul, AuD; Katherine Rhoads, AuD; Brynn Ruark, AuD; Susan Smittkamp, AuD, PhD; Katelyn Waldeier, AuD; and Travis Hopkins Williams, AuD.



To refer a patient, call (855) 547-8745 or visit hearingyourbest.com.

ASSOCIATED AUDIOLOGISTS, INC.

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