

A HEARING AID FOR EVERYONE?

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Many people think that the answer for a person with hearing loss is a hearing aid. Is a hearing aid always the answer? Certainly not. In fact, most people who consult an ear doctor because of hearing loss are helped to hear better without the use of hearing aids.

How can you hear better without a hearing aid?

By eliminating the problem or problems that have caused the hearing loss in the first place. ANYTHING that interferes with normal ear function can interfere with hearing. If you can correct the problem that is interfering with the hearing, you may improve the hearing.

What are examples of easy problems to correct?

One of the most common causes of hearing loss is earwax. Sometimes even a small piece of wax on the eardrum will cause a great deal of hearing loss. Removal of the wax should make a dramatic and sudden return of hearing. Infections of the ear canal may cause swelling that can even swell the canal completely shut. This blocks sound from traveling down the ear canal and reaching the eardrum. These infections usually respond readily to eardrops. Other infections and conditions such as allergy cause fluid to accumulate behind the eardrum and interfere with the transmission of sound from the eardrum to the middle ear. Antibiotics, decongestants, or allergy treatment often can eliminate this fluid.

Doesn't "nerve deafness" require a hearing aid?

Nerve deafness means that the problem is coming either from the inner ear, the nerve that leads from the ear to the brain, or the brain itself. Many of these problems cannot be helped without hearing aids. Conditions that can be treated medically include infections of the inner ear, allergies of the inner ear, ruptures of inner ear membranes, toxic effects of drugs, hormone imbalances, and tumors that grow in these areas.

Where does surgery fit in?

Many of the disorders that interfere with ear function are mechanical in nature. Most of these can be improved with surgery to correct the problem. Tumors in the ear can be removed. Perforations (holes) of the eardrum can be repaired. Bones in the ear, which become diseased, can be replaced. Birth defects of the ear can be corrected. Fluid that accumulates behind the eardrum can be drained.

How difficult is surgery?

Most surgical procedures to improve hearing can be performed as an office procedure or as an outpatient hospital procedure. Usually there is very little or no discomfort.

How can I diagnose and treat my problem?

You may want to consult your family doctor first. He may refer you to an ear specialist (an otolaryngologist). The ear specialist is a physician who specializes in diseases of the ear, nose, and throat, and has received special training to diagnose and treat hearing problems. He may be able to restore some or all of your hearing with medical or surgical treatment, or he may recommend a hearing aid. If a hearing aid is recommended, you may decide to purchase it from the ear specialist or from a licensed hearing aid dispenser. Before a dispenser can sell you a hearing aid, you must present a written statement signed by a physician stating that your hearing impairment has been medically evaluated and that you may be a candidate for a hearing aid. If you choose to waive the medical evaluation, the dispenser must advise you that the waiver is not in your best health interest. Dispensers are not allowed to encourage you to use this waiver. Anyone who sells you a hearing aid should allow you to use the aid for a trial period of one month and return the aid if you are not happy with it.

It's comforting to know that HEARING LOSS can usually be helped!
Although there are those times when it can also be a blessing ... (Let your imagination fill in the blanks)