

## Hearing Aid Misconceptions...

Hearing aids today are sophisticated, well-designed instruments, not only comfortable to wear but with many options to make them as appropriate as possible to each user. They are designed to cater for all hearing losses and lifestyles and are usually chosen after open discussion between the audiologist and the wearer as to what their hearing, lifestyle and budget needs are.

Many people still have the impression that hearing aids don't help, don't function well, are expensive, unsightly and uncomfortable to wear. Most of these misconceptions come from observing parents or grandparents' experiences, but thankfully times have changed and many of the advances made with computers, cell-phones and other electronic devices, have filtered down to hearing aids.

Some common misconceptions include:

Hearing aids do not work and do not help. Not true. The degree of help that you get from a modern hearing aid depends on your hearing loss. Hearing aids are programmed individually by the audiologist and are almost always helpful once adaptation has occurred. Hearing aids will not restore your hearing to normal, but they do result in better hearing and improved quality of life. The degree of benefit however, will differ from person to person and one should never compare hearing, hearing aids or the performance thereof. Every case is as different and individual as a fingerprint.

Hearing aids are big and unsightly. Not true. Today, most hearing aids are small, discreet and well designed. Some have even won international design awards! They can be worn behind the ear or custom-made to fit inside the ear canal. They are usually matched to hair colour and depending on the severity of hearing loss, can be almost invisible. They should be comfortable to wear and most people comment on how quickly they forget that there is something in their ears!

Hearing aids are expensive: Not always true. What is true, is that you get what you pay for. As with most things, the best is the most expensive. Compared to what was available 10 years ago, we have much more technology at our disposal which continues to filter through the different levels of hearing aid technology. For an entry level hearing aid today, one can pay around R6000, but the same technology would have cost R10 000 not even 5 years ago. For a top-end aid, one can expect to pay around R35 000, but again, this technology was not even dreamt of 5 years ago. Between these two levels there is a world of choice, depending on whether you need a Lamborghini, a Citi Golf or one of the many in-between options.

Hearing aids just amplify noise: Not true. As mentioned above, we are lucky these days to have access to much better technology before. If a person is very socially active and spends a lot of time in noisy places, they would need to purchase a more sophisticated hearing aid which would be better at noise suppression than its entry-level cousins. One's hearing loss also plays a role here, with the more severe losses requiring more help in these difficult to hear environments. We also rely heavily on the brain's ability to filter unwanted noise, so cognitive decline has to be considered.

Remember that most medical aids contribute something to the purchase of hearing aids. There is also a company called First Health Finance which offers flexible financing options where medical aid cover is insufficient or not available.

The best thing to do is to have your hearing checked regularly by a registered audiologist and openly discuss any concerns you may have about amplification options.

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