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Adjusting to your hearing aids

Action on Hearing Loss

actiononhearingloss.org.uk



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LOTTERY FUNDED**

“It took me a few months to adjust to my hearing aids - having something in my ears and hearing every little noise. But once I got used to this, my hearing aids became ‘part of me’.

I started to meet friends again, instead of thinking there was no point because I wouldn’t hear. I could join in with conversation and laughter around the table with my grandchildren, rather than retreating to the kitchen and leaving them to it with my husband. I was able to enjoy everyday life again.

I’ve now used hearing aids for 20 years. I still have some hearing difficulties, such as understanding accents on the phone, but when I take my hearing aids out, I notice how quiet everything is. What a difference they make.”

Jenny, East Sussex

In this leaflet, we explain what can help you to adjust to your hearing aids and get the most out of them. We tell you how to fit, use and take care of your hearing aids, so you can get back to enjoying conversation, TV, music and much more.

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Please let our Information Line know if you'd like this leaflet in standard print, braille or audio (see page 41 for contact details).

What should I expect from my hearing aids?

Your hearing aids can't give you perfect hearing, but they should make the sounds you find difficult to hear louder. They should help you to hear speech more clearly, so you can join in conversations again, and help you to hear everyday sounds such as the doorbell and telephone ringing.

Most hearing aids are also designed to reduce certain kinds of background noise, such as the rumble of traffic. This makes listening more comfortable, but you might still struggle to pick out one voice from general chatter, as hearing aids can't cut out background noise completely. In these situations, you can use assistive listening devices with your hearing aids to help improve the clarity of the sound you hear (**see page 15**). Lipreading and communication tactics can also be a huge help when you can't hear everything that's being said (**see page 37**).

Your hearing aids should never make sounds uncomfortably loud or make your hearing worse. You may find that your natural hearing seems dull when you take out your hearing aids, but that's just because you've become used to hearing better while using them.

How long will it take me to get used to my hearing aids?

When you first get hearing aids, it'll take some time to get used to:

- the feeling of them in your ears
- using different settings
- cleaning and maintaining them
- learning to deal with all the new sounds you can now hear.

Research findings vary, but one study shows that, on average, it takes around a month to adjust to hearing aids and get the most out of them, when using them regularly in various situations. But it can take longer - everyone's different.

At first, what you hear through your hearing aids might sound different or odd, or you may find normal background sounds - such as the hum of a fridge, the ticking of a clock or the turning of a newspaper page - too loud. The reality is that your brain hasn't heard these sounds at their correct levels for a long time, and it will take a little time for your brain to learn that this sound level is normal. Don't start thinking that hearing aids aren't right for you and give up - it just takes a bit of time for your brain to adapt.

What's the right way to fit my hearing aids?

The NHS usually provides behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids. These pass sound into your ear through either:

- an earmould that sits inside your ear (see picture A) - most BTE aids have earmoulds
- a small, soft tip (dome), known as an 'open ear fitting' (see picture B).

Some NHS audiology services also fit receiver-in-the-ear (RITE) or loudspeaker-in-the-ear BTEs (see picture C). These have a clear tube with a wire inside, which runs from the main part of the aid to a loudspeaker held in the ear by a soft earpiece.

A



B



C



The step-by-step guides on the following pages show you how to fit these different types of hearing aid correctly.

Tip: Hearing aids often have a colour-coded marker on them so that you know which ear the aid is for. This marker is always **red** for the right ear and **blue** for the left.

How to fit hearing aids with an earmould

1. Hold the earmould at the back with your finger and thumb.



2. Put the part that goes down the ear canal into position.



3. Use your other hand to pull down your earlobe. Push the earmould firmly into the 'bowl' of your ear, and place the hearing aid behind your ear.



4. Correctly fitted aid.



- 5.** Incorrectly fitted aid: the top part of the earmould isn't tucked into the top of the bowl of the ear. If your hearing aid isn't fitted correctly, it may whistle or your ear may become painful.



How to fit hearing aids with an open ear fitting or receiver in the ear

1. Hold the hearing aid behind your ear with the soft tip facing towards your ear canal.



2. Place the soft tip in your ear canal with the tail facing backwards (if there is a tail - sometimes the open ear fitting doesn't have one). Push the tip in as far as it will comfortably go, otherwise you won't hear as well as you should.



- 3.** If there is a tail, fold it backwards into the bowl of your ear. Sometimes, when it's new, the tail doesn't stay in place, but after a few days it should mould itself to the shape of your ear.



- 4.** Correctly fitted hearing aid.



What can help me get used to my hearing aids?

You might find this step-by-step guide useful. Just remember to go at a pace that feels right for you.

- 1. Slowly build up the time you spend using your hearing aids** - start by using them once or twice a day for an hour or two, in quiet surroundings. (But if your hearing aids feel comfortable, wear them for as long as you can!)
- 2. Listen to everyday noises** - for example, the kettle boiling, the fridge humming, and doors opening and shutting - to get used to how they sound. Remember that your brain may have adjusted to not hearing a lot of sounds and may need time to re-learn the significance of them and to ignore unimportant ones.
- 3. Use your hearing aids while watching TV** - this will help you adjust to hearing different sounds.
- 4. Try conversations with one person** - make sure you're in a quiet room and that the other person sits facing you in good light, so it's easier to lipread them (**see page 37** for more on lipreading).
- 5. Try group conversations** - don't expect to hear everything that's said when you're with more than one person, but try to follow the conversation.
- 6. Practise using your hearing aids outside** - be aware that some sounds can seem very loud until you get used to them.
- 7. Try using your hearing aids in noisy places** - these are likely to be the most difficult listening situations.

Our audiology experts suggest you take out your hearing aids when you go to bed, because it will feel more comfortable and give your ears some time to 'breathe'.

There's a range of vibrating alarm clocks and smoke alarms designed for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, to alert you at night when you don't have your hearing aids in.

More information: To find out more about alerts and alarms, see our factsheet '**Alerting devices**'.

Having problems?

It's not unusual to find it hard to adjust to the sounds you hear through your hearing aids. But you should find that the more you use your hearing aids, the easier it gets.

If, after a month or so, you're still having problems, ask your audiologist (hearing specialist) if they can alter the settings to better suit your needs. Let them know if there are particular situations that you find difficult, such as in meetings or when listening to music, or if particular noises sound strange or distorted - tinny, for example. The more information you give your audiologist, the better they can tailor the sound to your needs.

More information: See 'Where can I get more help with my hearing aids?', **page 36**.

What can help me hear when there's background noise?

Assistive listening devices can help you hear better through your hearing aids when there's background noise. There's a wide range of listening devices for use in different settings - for example, when having a one-to-one conversation, taking part in a group conversation, watching the TV or using the phone. These devices help you to focus on the sound you want to hear and improve sound quality. You need to use assistive listening devices with either a neckloop (see picture 1) or ear hooks (see picture 2). These accessories send amplified sound straight to your hearing aids when they're on the hearing loop setting (**see page 17**). They can be supplied with the listening device or sold separately. Some are wired, others are wireless.

You wear a neckloop around your neck, and ear hooks fit over your ears.

1





Many hearing aids can also link up with Bluetooth-compatible TVs, smartphones, laptops and lapel microphones, through a Bluetooth streaming device or a Bluetooth neckloop or ear hooks. There are also Bluetooth-compatible hearing aids that can connect to Bluetooth-compatible devices directly - without a streaming device, neckloop or ear hooks - these are referred to as Made For iPhone (MFi) hearing aids. Ask your audiologist about your options.

More information: To find out more, see our factsheet 'Understanding wireless technology for hearing aids'.

What is the hearing loop setting?

Most hearing aids will have a hearing loop setting (formerly known as the 'T' setting). Your audiologist should have activated this for you at your hearing aid fitting, so you can switch it on and off as and when you need it. If you don't think you have this setting, check with your audiologist.

When you switch your hearing aids to the loop setting, you'll be able to pick up sound from assistive listening devices (when using a neckloop or ear hooks - **see page 15**) and hearing loop systems (loops).

A hearing loop helps you hear more clearly over background noise, as it sends sound from a sound source - for example, a microphone - directly to your hearing aids.

Loops are often found in public places such as theatres, cinemas, shops and banks, and should be clearly advertised by the sign below.



You can also get loop systems for your home. Telephones described as 'hearing aid compatible' have a type of built-in loop that can give you a clearer phone conversation with less background noise.

An infrared system is often used as an alternative to a loop system in entertainment venues. If an infrared system is available, you'll need to collect a receiver (sometimes called a listener) from the reception desk or ticket office. To use an infrared system with hearing aids, you'll need a receiver that has a neckloop, which you use with your hearing aids on the loop setting.

You can also get infrared systems for your home.

What other useful hearing aid settings are there?

Many hearing aids allow you to switch between different settings for different situations - for example, when you're listening to music or having a conversation in a noisy place. Some hearing aids adjust to these different sound environments automatically. They may also route sound that is mainly coming from one side across to the other, to help you hear better, and may have settings to reduce wind noise.

Speak to your audiologist if you'd like to find out more about the different hearing aid settings that could help you.

What's the best way to clean my hearing aids?

Hearing aids with earmoulds

Clean the main part of your hearing aid by wiping it carefully with a soft, dry cloth or tissue. Or, if you prefer, use a wet-wipe that's non-alcohol based. Take care not to get the hearing aid wet.

Every night, wipe the earmould with a soft, dry cloth, a tissue or a wet-wipe. Don't use any chemicals as they could damage it. Use nylon line or something similar to remove any wax or debris that has got into the channel that goes through the earmould.

About once a week, separate the earmould from the hearing aid and wash it. But check this with your audiologist first. If you use two hearing aids, you may find it easier to separate and clean one aid at a time to avoid confusion.

Follow the instructions below for washing the earmould:

- Pull the soft tubing off the hooked part of the hearing aid by holding on to the tubing with one hand and the hook of the aid with the other, and tugging gently. Don't pull the tubing out of the earmould as you won't get it back in again.



- Wash the earmould (with its tubing still in place) in warm, soapy water. Use a nailbrush or a vent cleaner (or both) to remove any wax. Rinse it well, blow down the tubing to get the water out and leave it to dry overnight. Then push the tubing back on to the hearing aid.



The first picture below shows the earmould put back the wrong way round. Make sure that the curve of the earmould goes the same way as the curve of your hearing aid, as shown in the second picture below.

Incorrect:



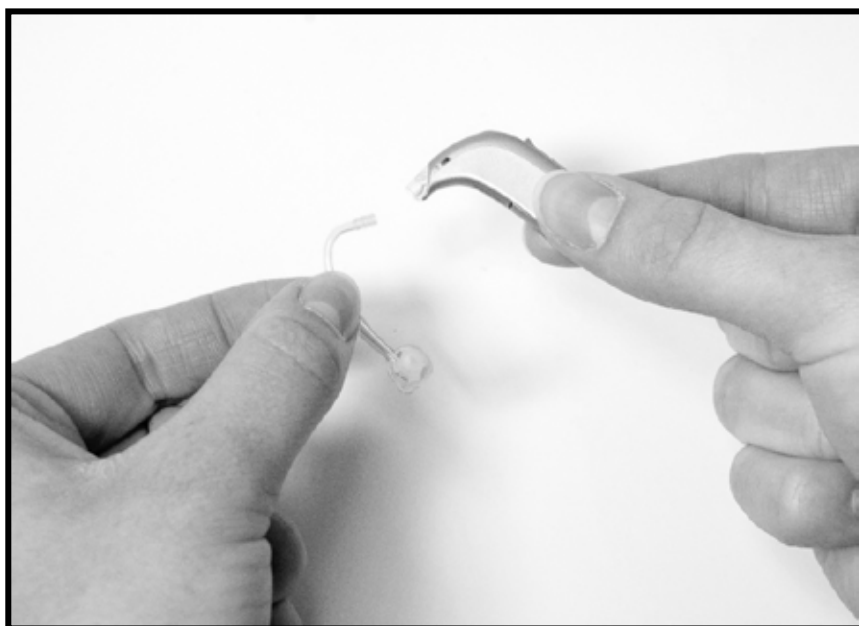
Correct:



Hearing aids with an open ear fitting

The step-by-step guide below shows you how to clean the tubing of your open ear fitting with a cleaning wire. The way you take off the tubing for cleaning is a bit different from one type of open ear fitting to another, so you'll need to check the instructions you've been given.

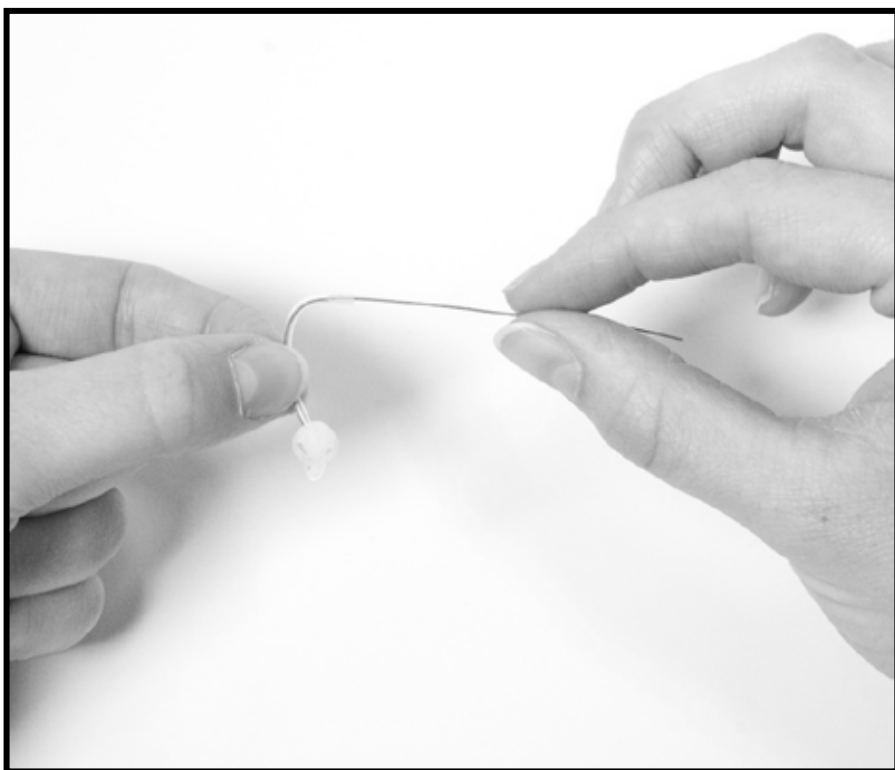
1



2



3



4



Hearing aids that fit inside your ear

In-the-ear (ITE) or **in-the-canal (ITC)** hearing aids (see picture) are sometimes fitted by the NHS when BTE aids aren't suitable - for example, if the outside of your ear is damaged. Or, if they're appropriate, you can choose to buy these hearing aids privately. ITE aids can be seen from the side. The smallest ITC aids fit inside your ear; they are less visible but can still be seen from the side.



Completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids sit further inside your ear canal, and **invisible-in-the-ear (IIC)** hearing aids are fitted very deeply in the ear canal. CIC and IIC aids are usually only available privately. Some IIC hearing aids stay in the ear for a few months at a time and can only be removed by an audiologist, who will maintain and clean the aid for you. You can take other models out of your ear by yourself. CIC and IIC aids do not always have special functions or features - for example, the hearing loop setting or the ability to connect to Bluetooth devices.

If you have hearing aids that fit inside your ear, don't wash them as this could damage them. Wipe them with a dry tissue and use a soft, dry brush to remove wax from the opening. Don't poke anything into the opening as you may damage the earphone. Your hearing aids should have come with cleaning tools and instructions on changing the wax guards. If not, or if you need any advice on how to look after your hearing aids, speak to your audiologist.

How often do I need to change the batteries?

You'll usually need to change your hearing aid batteries every 1-2 weeks. Many hearing aids will give a warning beep when the battery is low. Your audiologist can show you how to change the battery if you haven't already been shown or need a reminder.

Remember to switch your hearing aids off when you take them out, to save the batteries and to prevent whistling noises. And don't forget to carry spare batteries when you go out.

Where can I get new batteries?

If you have NHS hearing aids, you can get free batteries from any NHS audiology service or ear, nose and throat department that has a battery service. You might also be able to get them from your local health centre, by post, or from our hearing aid support service (**see page 36**). Ask your audiologist about local arrangements.

If you bought your hearing aids privately, batteries may be included in your payment plan. If not, you'll need to buy batteries from a pharmacy or your hearing aid provider. They can cost between £3 and £8 for a pack of six.

What about repairs and replacements?

On average, hearing aids last 3-5 years. If you get your hearing aids from the NHS, repairs and replacements are free if the aids stop working properly or if you need a different type because your hearing changes. But if you lose or damage your hearing aids, you may be asked to pay something towards their repair or replacement. New earmoulds, tubing, filters and batteries are also free.

If you bought your hearing aids privately, there may be a charge for repairs and replacement tubing and filters, as well as a charge for lost or damaged hearing aids.

Some private audiology services in England are part of the Any Qualified Provider scheme, which means they provide NHS audiology services alongside private services. Their repair and replacement policies vary.

More information: For more information, see our factsheet '**Everything you need to know about getting hearing aids**'.

Hearing aids with earmoulds

If your earmoulds become loose or uncomfortable, ask your audiologist to take a look, as they may be able to adjust them. If the problem can't be fixed, they'll make new ones.

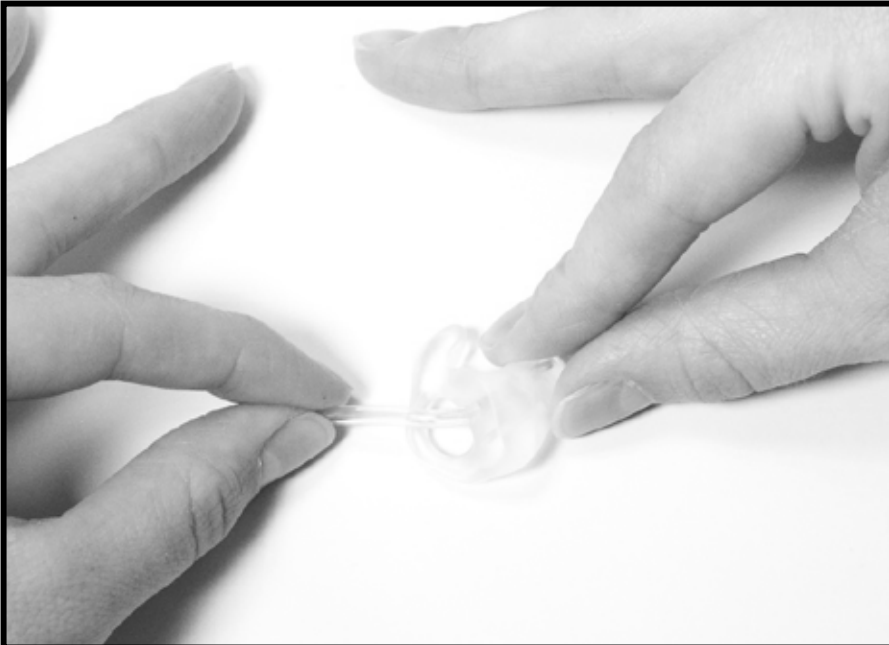
Some people are allergic to, or may become allergic to, the earmould material and may need special moulds made from non-allergenic material.

The tubing will need changing every 3-6 months to prevent it hardening, splitting and causing problems. Your audiologist can do this for you, or show you how to do it yourself (see diagram on **pages 27-32**).

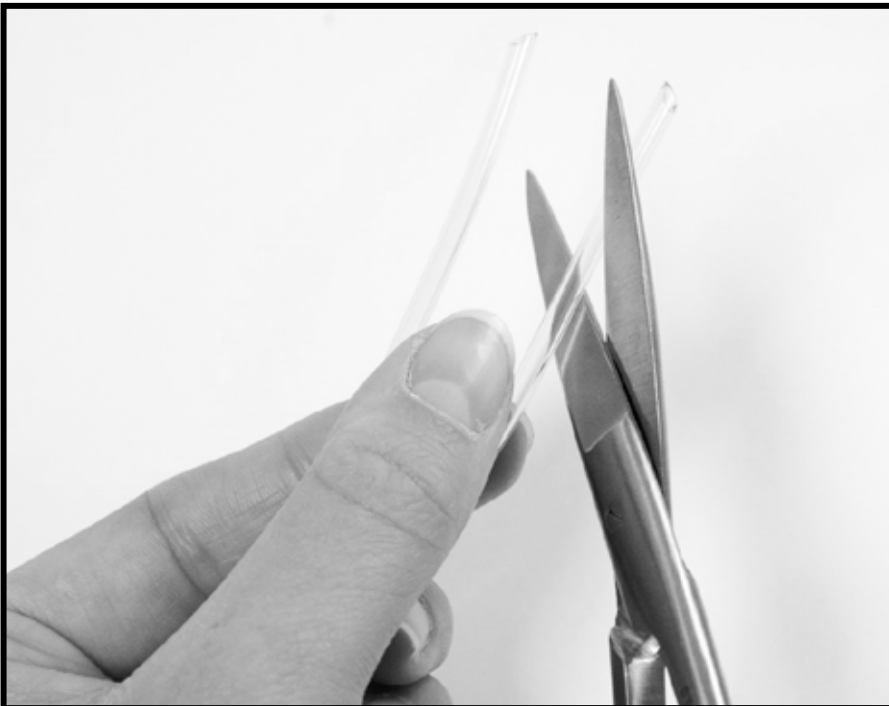
How to change the tubing

Note 1: This may already be done for you.

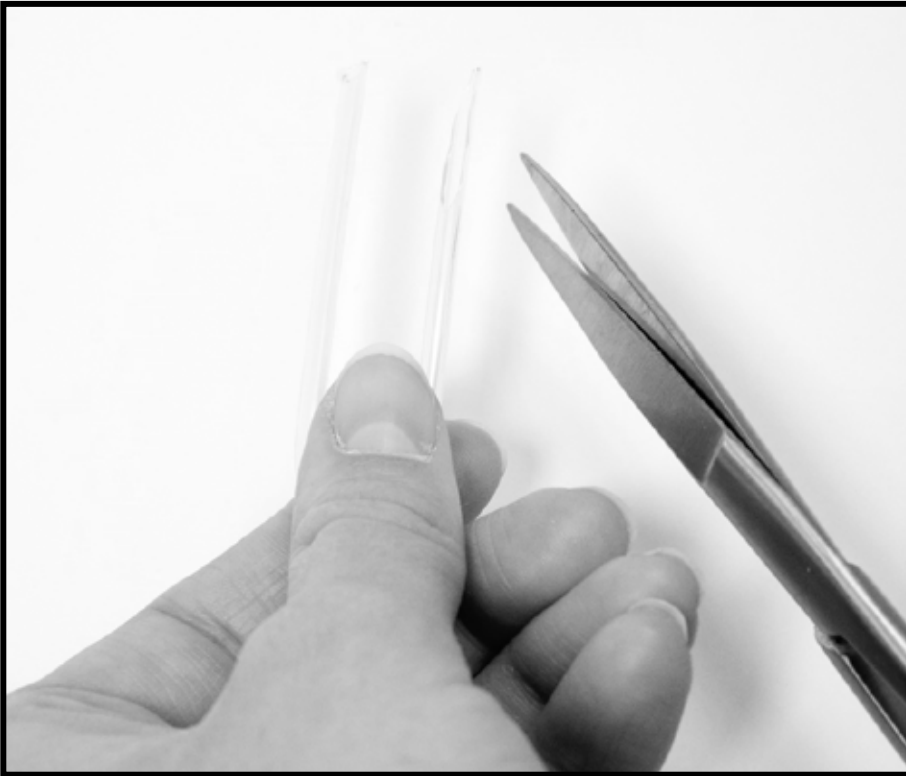
1. Pull old tubing out slowly and steadily.



2. Cut end off new tubing at a slant (see note 1)...



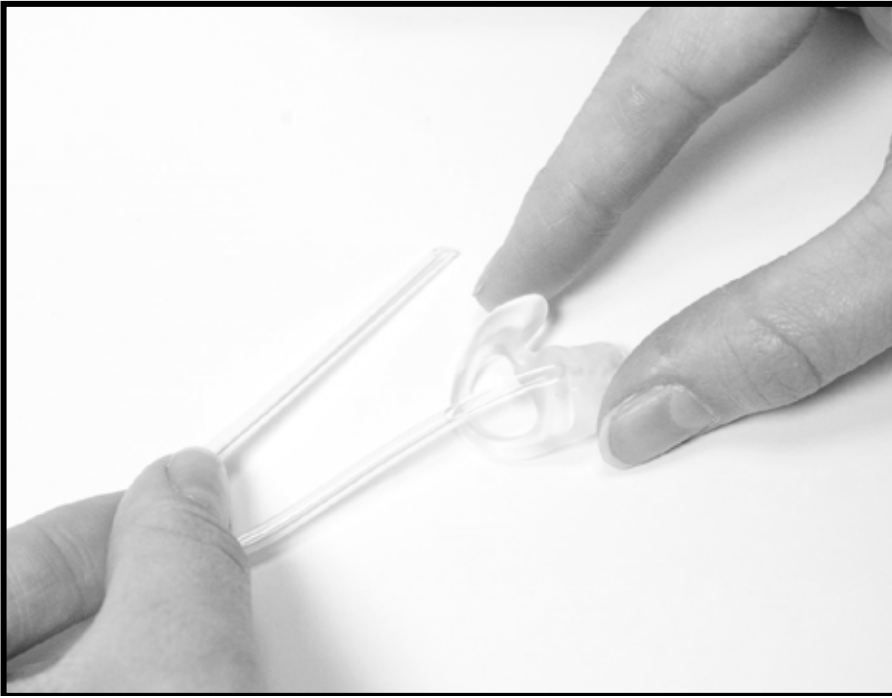
3. ...so you are left with a tapered end.



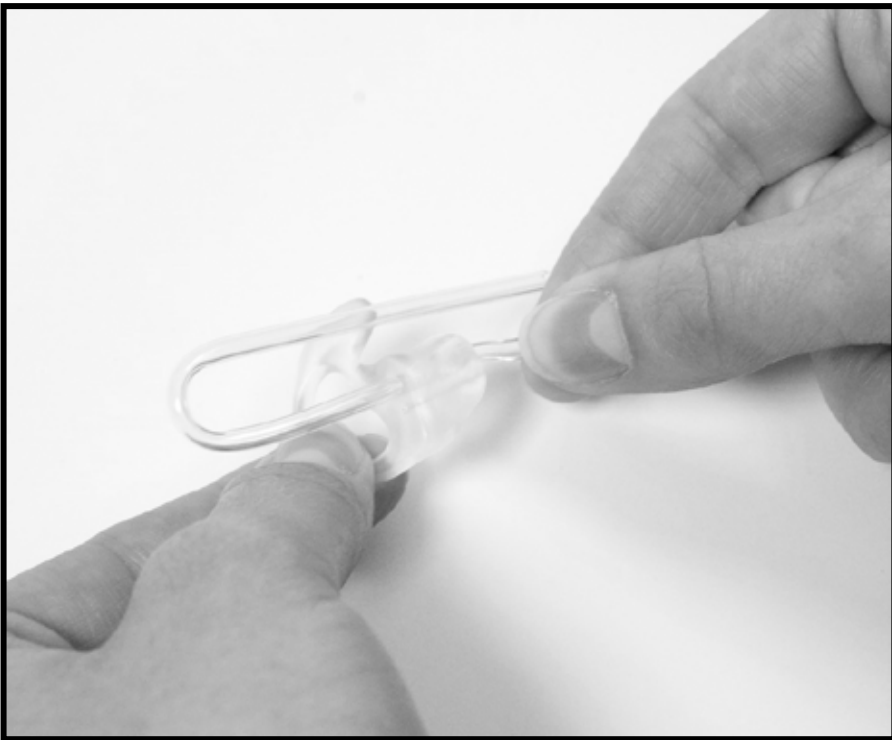
4.



5. Push tapered end into earmould.



6. Thread tapered end through...



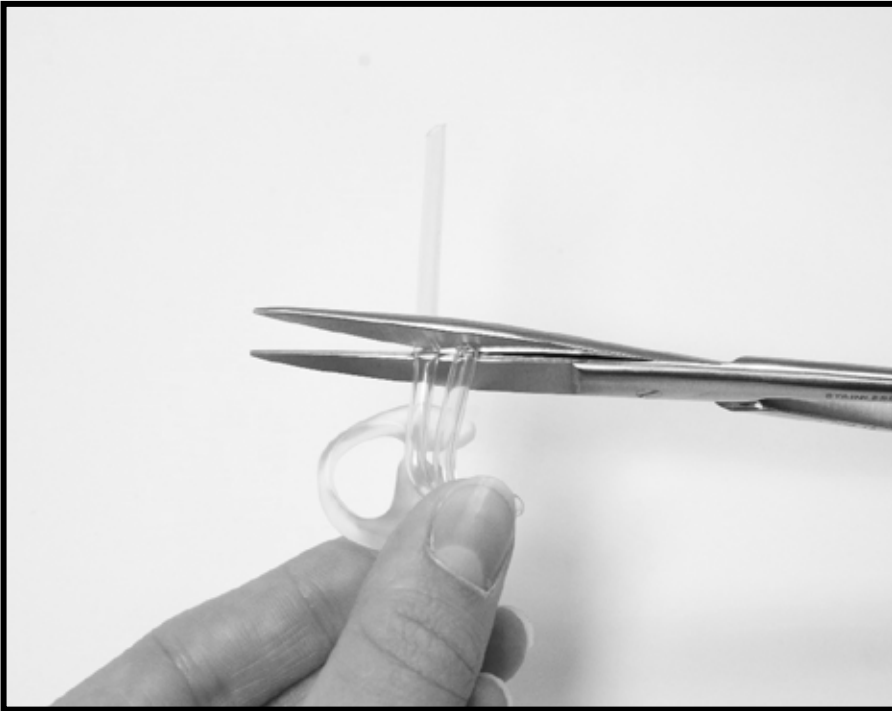
7. ...until bend reaches earmould.



8. Cut close to earmould.



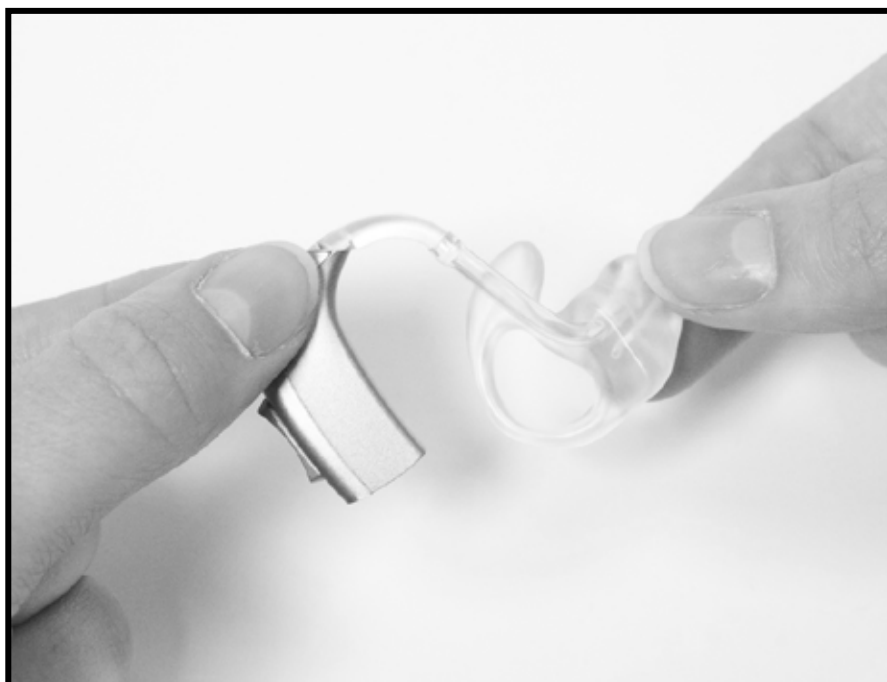
9. Line up with old tubing and cut...



10. ...to same length.



11. Reattach hearing aid to earmould.



12. Correctly fitted tubing.



Hearing aids with an open ear fitting

If, instead of earmoulds, you have thin tubes with small, soft tips, these will need changing every 4-6 months. Your audiologist will show you how to do this.

What should I check if my hearing aid isn't working properly?

If you're having problems with one, or both, of your hearing aids, your audiologist can help you. But there are some common problems that you might be able to solve yourself.

No sound or very muffled sound?

- Check that the hearing aid is correctly fitted.
- Check that the hearing aid is switched on properly.
- If your hearing aid has a volume control, check it's not been turned right down.
- Check that you haven't switched your hearing aid to the hearing loop setting by accident.
- Check that there isn't moisture in the tubing (**see page 33**).
- If your hearing aid has an earmould or soft tip, check it isn't blocked with ear wax.
- If you have a hearing aid that fits inside your ear, or an RITE hearing aid, check to see if the wax filter needs changing.
- Check that the battery is the right way round. If it is, try replacing it with a new one.

Moisture in the tubing

If your hearing aid has tubing, there may be moisture in it - pull the tubing gently off the hearing aid, at the hook, and blow through it to remove any droplets that might have collected. If condensation continues to be a problem, ask your audiologist if you can have low-condensation tubing.

Moisture can sometimes build up in the hook of the hearing aid too. Your audiologist can replace this. The other option is to buy an air puffer, which you can use to blow the moisture out of the tube.

Wind and weather strip

Some hearing aids have a wind and weather strip that protects the microphone. This can sometimes get clogged, making the sounds unclear and quieter, and may need changing. Ask your audiologist if your hearing aids have this feature, as they can show you how to change the strip. If you have trouble changing it yourself, your audiologist can do it for you.

Note: If you've checked all of these things and are still having problems, take your hearing aid(s) back to your audiologist to see if it (or they) need to be repaired.

Buzzing noises?

This might mean you've switched your hearing aid to the loop setting by accident.

Whistling or squeaking noises when using a BTE hearing aid?

This might mean that:

- the earmould isn't in your ear correctly - check by taking it out and pushing it gently back in
- you have excess ear wax in your ear - ask your GP to check
- the earmould doesn't fit your ear closely enough (because it is old or if you have lost weight) - speak to your audiologist
- the earmould's hooked 'elbow' or tubing has become loose or split - if this is the problem, you'll need help from your audiologist
- if you have an open ear fitting, the thin tubing or soft tip may not be right for you - you'll need to return to your audiologist and try a different size
- the open ear fitting may not be inserted correctly, or it might have worked itself out over the day.

Ear problems?

If you have itching, discharge from the ear or earache, see your GP. You might also find our leaflet **Ear problems and treatments** useful.

Where can I get more help with my hearing aids?

There's plenty of support available to help you overcome any issues you have with your hearing aids.

Your audiology service

If you have NHS hearing aids, you should have a follow-up appointment or telephone review with your audiology service 6-12 weeks after the hearing aid fitting. If you need help in between appointments or after this time, contact your audiology service. Some can even arrange home visits if it's difficult for you to travel.

If you've bought hearing aids privately, you'll usually have your first follow-up appointment within two weeks of having your hearing aids fitted.

Action on Hearing Loss hearing aid help

If you use NHS hearing aids and need some help with them, our free hearing aid support service might be just what you need. As yet, the service doesn't cover the whole of the UK, but it's growing all the time. If the service is available in your area, our community support officers and volunteers can help you to manage and look after your hearing aids through a drop-in service or home visits. They can clean earmoulds and replace tubing and batteries, to help you get the most out of your hearing aids.

They can also give you information about equipment that can make life easier at home or in the workplace, and signpost you to other local support services such as lipreading classes and support groups for people with hearing loss.

Contact our Information Line or visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk/heartohelp** to find out if there's a hearing aid support service near you.

How can lipreading help?

Lipreading is an essential skill for people with hearing loss. It's the ability to recognise the lip shapes, gestures and facial movements of the person you're talking to, so that you can fill in the gaps when you can't hear everything that's being said.

Our research has highlighted how lipreading classes can greatly improve communication and help people to better manage their hearing loss through lipreading and communication tactics. To find out if there's a class in your area, contact our Information Line (**see page 41**) or visit the website of the Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults: **atlalipreading.org.uk**

If you're unable to go to a class, you can practise lipreading at home thanks to the website **lipreadingpractice.co.uk**

More information: To find out more, see our leaflet 'Learning to lipread'. For communication tips, visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communicationtips**

Where can I get more information?

Action on Hearing Loss has a wide range of information on all aspects of deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. We have the latest information on hearing health, hearing aids and cochlear implants, assistive technology and products, communication support, rights and benefits.

You can also find out about services in your area, becoming a member and receiving our magazine, the latest research developments, and getting involved as a volunteer or supporter.

Visit our website - **actiononhearingloss.org.uk** - or contact our free, confidential Information Line (**see page 41** for contact details).

To see our full range of leaflets and factsheets, visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk/publications**

Information you can trust

The Information Standard certifies us as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. For a list of references for this leaflet, please email **references@hearingloss.org.uk**

Thank you to **Yashmita Dajee**, Clinical Scientist (Audiology) at Hearing and Balance Services, King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor, for reviewing this leaflet and ensuring that it is based on reliable, up-to-date research and evidence.

Did you find this information helpful?

Please share your feedback by emailing us at **reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk** And if you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create and review information for our website and publications, please let us know.

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Kitchen

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We have a wide range of specially selected, tried and tested products that will make life easier for you, or someone in your family, at home, at work or when out and about. And every time you buy from us, you're making a donation to our charity.

For product recommendations to suit your hearing needs, or to request a product catalogue, contact our Customer Services Team:

Telephone: 03330 144 525

Email: solutions@hearingloss.org.uk

Note 2: Applies to all products. Excludes P&P and VAT.

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk**

Questions about deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss?

Contact our free, confidential Information Line:

Telephone: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

SMS: 0780 000 0360 (standard text message rates apply)

Email: information@hearingloss.org.uk

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