

Hearing Aid Care

The hearing aid care guide describes how to check hearing aid function and fix common problems. Hearing aids can malfunction for different reasons, and children need their hearing aids to work correctly to hear the sounds around them and to learn. You can find and fix problems quickly when you check the hearing aids every morning, before school and therapy sessions, and when you have a concern.

Hearing aids have many parts, and even though hearing aids work in similar ways, some parts may look different from one hearing aid to another. The behind-the-ear hearing aid is the most common style for children and is the focus of this training video. There are five basic parts to check each day, the earmold, tone hook, microphone, the buttons to control the volume or programs, and the battery compartment. For young children it is common for the volume control and program button disabled. The tone hook at the top of the hearing aid connects to the earmold tubing. The earmold sits in the child's ear and the sound passes through the earmold tubing into the ear canal. Hearing aids are programmed specifically for each ear. If the hearing aid is not on the correct ear, the amplified sound may be too loud and this can hurt the ear or it can be too soft and the child will not hear well. It can be helpful to mark the hearing aids with a sticker or a colored dot to help you remember which is for the right ear and which is for the left ear. It is also important to know how to tell the right earmold from the left. The earmold is typically made to fill the bowl shaped part of the ear and extends into the ear canal. The rounded edge goes towards the back of the ear, by the hearing aid, and the tube goes up to connect to the hearing aid tone hook.

The earmold is custom made to fit the child's ear. To keep a snug fit in the ear, the earmold is replaced as the child grows. This can be as often as every 4 weeks for infants. As children get older the earmold will not need to be replaced as often, and the tubing in the earmold may harden and need to be replaced.

Learning how to put in and take out the earmold takes practice. Young children do not usually like to hold still and may move or cry. Because the ear canal is curved, it helps to angle the earmold forward, towards the child's nose, as you put it in and take it out. To insert the earmold place the canal portion in the ear canal and then turn the earmold towards the back of the head. It should fit flat in the ear without any portions protruding out.

To remove the earmold, grasp the back of the earmold and lift it from the ear and gradually turn it forward towards the child's nose as you pull it from the ear.

For the amplified sound to pass through the earmold to the ear, the earmold tubing needs to be free of moisture and earwax. If the earmold becomes dirty, you can remove it from the hearing aid and clean it with warm, soapy water. Let the earmold dry overnight, and then reattach the earmold to the hearing aid in the morning when it is dry.



To check the hearing aid function there are tools you need to have on hand. People that are with the child on a regular basis need to have a care kit, that includes the parents, regular caregivers, early interventionist, speech language pathologist, and teacher. If you do not have a hearing aid care kit, ask your audiologist to order one for you.

The listening tube is a tool that helps you check how the hearing aid sounds. It is important to be familiar with how the hearing aids should sound so you can gage when something is wrong. Hearing aid batteries can become or weak fairly quickly, and can be checked using a battery tester.

A cleaning tool with a wire loop is used to clean blockage from the earmold opening. The tool often has a brush on the other end to clean away debris from the hearing aid and the microphone cover.

The air blower is used to remove moisture from the earmold tubing. Remove the earmold from the hearing aid before using the air blower.

The dry aid kit draws moisture out of the hearing aid. Moisture can build up inside the hearing aid from typical use, and cause damage. At night, remove the batteries and put the hearing aids in the dry aid kit. Over time the dry aid kit may need to be replaced, follow the maintenance instructions on the box of your kit.

The daily check includes two steps. The first step is to look at the physical condition of the hearing aids and earmolds. Check for damage, such as tears in the earmold or tubing, or blockage that may interfere with the sound being picked up by the microphone or with the sound passing through the earmold into the child's ear.

The second step is to listen to the hearing aid using the listening tube. Place the bulb shaped end into your ear canal, and then connect the flared or bell shaped end to the earmold. It needs to fit snugly around the earmold because if amplified sound leaks out you will hear feedback and it can be hard to tell if the hearing aid is working properly.

You may want to listen to the hearing aids in a quiet room, and it can be helpful to say the Ling sounds - "ah" "ee", "oo", "mm", "sh" and "ss" to check the volume and the quality of the sounds. If your child has powerful hearing aids, ask for a listening tube that has a filter to reduce the loudness level of the sound.

Many problems identified with hearing aid function can be easily addressed. Each time you take a step to address a problem do a listening check of the hearing aid again and see if what you did made a difference in how the hearing aid sounds.

If the hearing aid sounds weak or if it is not amplifying at all, check the battery. If the battery is okay, then look at the earmold opening where the sound leaves the earmold to enter the ear canal, and see if there is wax buildup in the opening. Wax can block the passage and cause the hearing aid to sound weak. If you see wax, clean it with the wire loop. If there is no blockage in the earmold, look at the microphone opening and see if there is any visible debris blocking sound from entering the hearing aid. If it looks dirty carefully remove the debris with the brush. Some hearing aids have microphone covers that need to be replaced periodically. This can be



done by the audiologist in the office, or the audiologist can show you how to do it at home and provide you with extra microphone covers.

The tone hook often has a filter in it, and the filter can become blocked with moisture. If the hearing aid still sounds weak, remove the tone hook while the hearing aid is turned on, and listen to the feedback, if it is louder after you remove the tone hook a new tone hook is needed. This can also be done by the audiologist in the office, or the audiologist can show you how to do it at home and provide you with extra tone hooks. These parts are specific to the hearing aid and are often not interchangeable between different hearing aid models.

If the hearing aid sounds distorted or has a static type sound, check the battery and the battery contacts. Battery contacts can become dirty and that will interfere with how the battery works. You can clean the battery contacts by putting a little contact cleaner on the end of a pipe cleaner, and rubbing the pipe cleaner on the battery contacts. Also check for wax blockage in the earmold, and debris on the microphone opening.

If the hearing aids are making a feedback noise when the child has them on, it is important to check that the earmold is inserted completely in the ear. If the hearing aid is not seated snugly in the ear, amplified sound can leak out and cause the hearing aid to make a whistling sound. Sometimes internal component can get jarred, and feedback can come from a malfunction inside the hearing aid. To check for internal feedback, turn the hearing aid on and cover the earmold opening with your finger. If you still hear feedback, remove the earmold from the tone hook and cover the tone hook opening with your finger. If the feedback goes away, the cause may be a crack in the earmold or the tubing. If the feedback continues, remove the tone hook and cover the hearing aid opening with your finger. If the feedback goes away, there may be a crack in the tone hook. If the feedback continues, it is internal feedback and the hearing aid will need to be sent in for repair.

Wax build-up in the ear canal can also cause feedback. The audiologist can determine if this is a problem by looking in the child's ear with the otoscope. It may be necessary to have the child's physician remove the wax build-up.

If you are not able to solve the problem, contact the audiologist right away. If the hearing aid needs to be sent out for repair, request a loaner hearing aid so the child is not without access to sound.