

## **Choosing the “RIGHT” Hearing Aid and/or Cochlear Implant**

There are many types of hearing aids in the world. There are a number of companies that provide them, yet how do you choose which is the right one for you or your child?

### Hearing Aid Styles

All hearing aids contain the same parts to carry sound from the environment into your ear. However, hearing aids do come in a number of styles, which differ in size and the way they're placed in your ear. Some are small enough to fit inside your ear canal, making them almost invisible. Others fit partially in your ear canal. Generally, the smaller a hearing aid is, the less powerful it is, the shorter its battery life and the more it'll cost. (Mayo Clinic) Children are usually fit with the behind-the-ear (BTE) style. The BTE provides more flexibility with the amount of power it provides and as the child grows the only thing that needs replacing is the earmold attached to the hearing aid to hold it in the ear.

### Hearing Aid Electronics

Hearing aid electronics control how sound is transferred from the environment to your inner ear. All hearing aids amplify sounds, making them louder so that you can hear them better. Most hearing aid manufacturers now only produce digital hearing.

With digital technology, a computer chip converts the incoming sound into digital code, then analyzes and adjusts the sound based on your hearing loss, listening needs and the level of the sounds around you. The signals are then converted back into sound waves and delivered to your ears. The result is sound that's more finely tuned to your hearing loss. Digital hearing aids are available in all styles and price ranges. (Mayo Clinic)

There are many options that you are able to purchase for hearing aid. The options will help with background noise, use of the telephone, remote controls and programming options. Options are chosen based on you and the audiologist. For Children most of the time the audiologist, along with the parent, want the least amount of options that give the most benefit to the child. Most hearing aids are set with automatic volume control and programs so there are no “mistakes” made when the hearing aid is being worn. For example, if there is a volume control wheel and your child starts to play with the control on their hearing aid they may not be getting the volume needed to be beneficial, therefore an audiologist may disable the volume control button for that reason. There are child safety features on most hearing aids as well. One example of a safety feature is a lock on the battery door, this way a child is not able to open the battery door and accidentally ingest the battery which is poisonous.

When it is time to purchase a hearing aid for you or your child the first thing to do is to find a reputable audiologist. The audiologist will administer an in depth audiogram and then counsel on the outcome and recommendations. If hearing aids are recommended the audiologist will then review the best options based on you or your child's needs. Those needs are discussed with the audiologist as they are counseling you on the audiogram and the information you tell them. Your needs versus your child's versus another individual are very different.

Audiologists usually deal with many different hearing aid companies. Each company sells specific models of hearing aids. Believe it or not each model then has sub models depending on the options you can or cannot put in each hearing aid. As you can imagine it opens up too many

options to cover with every patient. Therefore, it is the Audiologists job to know the hearing aids and the options available and have a few in mind to recommend to an individual. The audiologist may work with specific companies which will help him/her narrow down the choices. They may have had experiences with certain hearing aids that they know have a great outcome and response. They will then share the information with you and you can help make a choice of the “right” hearing aid for you or your child.

This is not to say that you have to stick with the first hearing aid chosen. In NYS there is a MANDATORY 45 day trial period with a hearing aid. The trial period starts the day that the hearing aid is delivered to you, not necessarily the day you purchase the hearing aid. If you are within that 45 day trial period you are able to return the hearing aid for a full reimbursement (of the hearing aid(s) themselves, not necessarily the services provided). You may also decide to try a different hearing aid that would begin a new 45 day trial. For children this may or may not be necessary. If for some reason the response from the child isn't what was expected then you may go through this process, but there are many hearing aids out there specifically for children that give good results if they are fit properly and the hearing loss is accurate.

Finding a reputable audiologist that will work with you is the best way to find the “right” amplification for you or your child. It is the audiologists' job to make recommendations based on the hearing loss and needs of each individual patient. Maintaining an open communication with the audiologist can only help the decisions that are made during the process of purchasing a hearing aid.

Cochlear implants are a completely different type of technology. There are only three companies that provide cochlear implant technology. When going to a center for a cochlear implant evaluation you may not have a choice of which company to go with. That center's surgeon is the one who chooses the type of implant an individual will receive based on which they prefer to implant. How each is inserted during surgery may be slightly different therefore the surgeon may have a preference. It should not prevent you from doing research about each company- Cochlear Americas, Advanced Bionics and Med el. are the three companies. You are able to research each company on the internet. In this area we see most children with Cochlear America's and Advanced Bionic equipment. Again, this is the preference of the center that you take your child to. It is recommended that parents thoroughly research all of your options and ask the questions that make you feel comfortable when making the decision to implant you or your child.

There is nothing easy about going through the process of choosing a hearing aid or cochlear implant for you or your child. It is important to ask many questions and do research to help you make that decision. There are multiple kinds of hearing aid technology out there so there is more than one good choice when buying hearing aids. If you trust your audiologist to help you through the process of picking out a hearing aid and/or deciding on a cochlear implant, hopefully much of the uncertainty will be taken away.