

# Are You A Good Candidate or a Poor Candidate for Hearing Aids

By Garth Brears

I believe the biggest problem associated with hearing aids is the unrealistic expectation that once worn, communication problems will go away quickly. Unfortunately, I believe in today's society we want and expect fast solutions to chronic problems. These unrealistic expectations are encouraged by slippery advertising that makes exaggerated promises.

The issue that is not represented is that the real work of improved communication only starts *after* the hearing aids are purchased. Even after all the hard rehabilitation work, the reality that the hearing loss will never go away eventually settles in. This can be heart-breaking for some.

My formal education was held in the Department of Communication Disorders. Here the thought process was that a hearing loss in itself is not the problem, it is how the individual deals with the hearing loss that matters. The idea was that often, but not necessarily always, a hearing loss will lead to communication problems.

An 80 year old lady with a hearing loss who lives alone, and can turn up the television and can use a speaker phone and carries on conversations with friends at her dinner table just fine does not have a communication problem. Therefore, this lady is not a candidate for hearing aids, in my books.

Conversely, we have a judge with a hearing loss who cannot hear testimony at ten feet, and he is upset about this. I would characterize this as a communication problem and he is a candidate for hearing aids. Now, the question is, is he a good candidate or a poor candidate for hearing aids?

- A *good* candidate is one who accepts that rehabilitation begins only **after** purchasing hearing aids,
- A *poor* candidate is one who thinks a hearing aid will solve their problems **upon** purchasing them or soon thereafter.

Based on the above criteria, my belief is that far too many people are fit with hearing aids simply because they have a hearing loss. Secondly, and just as important, I believe that too many people are fit with hearing aids despite the fact that they are poor candidates.

I can never stress this enough to my patients, "*a hearing aid is like a cane for someone recovering from a motor vehicle accident. It is the hardware that allows the person to begin the hard work of walking again, or in our case, hearing again.*"

Hearing is incredibly complex. It is a series of neurological events that unfold without our conscious awareness, which culminate in understanding complex messages like speech or non-complex messages like wind blowing through trees. I believe, like so many other things, we completely take this complex set of events for granted, until there is a malfunction. And in the case of hearing, it is usually long after we lose it that we decide to do something about it. And at that point, many minimize its complexity by thinking they can just buy it back with a simple hearing aid; often setting themselves up for failure.

One of the biggest complaints I hear regarding hearing aids, is that they only help in quiet places, but not in noise. Often, in the same breath, they state that they can already hear in quiet, even without a hearing aid. In addition, there is an unspoken belief that people with normal hearing can hear in noise just fine. I believe that none of these statements are necessarily true.

Please see article on "[Hearing aids working in quiet and in noise](#)"