

One Hearing Aid or Two Hearing Aids

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This is the most asked question that I get as an audiologist, “Do I need two hearing aids or can I get away with just wearing one?”

The answer to this question varies from one individual to the next and only a proper diagnostic hearing test will determine whether you should be wearing one or two hearing aids. There are instances when only one hearing aid is recommended. For example, if there is only hearing loss in one ear. This however is not the norm. A typical hearing loss caused by aging or excessive noise exposure results in a gradual hearing loss in both ears. In cases such as these, two hearing aids are recommended. There are several important reasons to consider wearing two hearing aids versus one hearing aid.

1. Better Hearing in Noise

The ability to hear in background noise occurs in the brain. The brain receives information from **both** ears, and “filters” out irrelevant information. If you are only wearing one hearing aid, the brain is unable to “filter” out noise effectively. If your primary complaint with your hearing is hearing in noise, wearing two hearing aids is a necessity as one hearing aid will likely increase your amount of difficulty.

2. Localization

Localization is the ability to figure out where sounds are coming from. In order to do this, the hearing in both ears must be the same. If you are only wearing one hearing aid, all sounds will appear as though they are coming from the aided ear. For example, if you are wearing a hearing aid in your right ear only, all sounds will appear to be coming from the right side, even though someone may be talking to you from the left side. This is particularly important in situations such as driving a car and being able to determine where the sirens from emergency vehicles are coming from.

3. Better Clarity

The majority of people with hearing loss have a high frequency hearing loss. The high frequencies are responsible for clarity of speech. People with high frequency hearing loss typically find that they can hear people talking however they can't make out the words, or find that speech is very muffled. Wearing one hearing aid will help to make speech more clear only if the speaker is in close proximity and on the same side as the aided ear. Two hearing aids allow you to hear much more clearly all around you, and from greater distances.

4. Less Adjustment to Volume Control

The majority of us know someone who is constantly adjusting the volume on their hearing aids. These people are probably wearing only one hearing aid. In order to compensate for the lack of clarity typical of only wearing one hearing aid, people will turn up the volume. However, this also increases the volume of surrounding background sounds causing frustration. Increased volume can also cause feedback or whistling from the hearing aid. People who wear two hearing aids generally require less volume and fewer adjustments to the volume control. Many of the hearing aids now available have an automatic volume control. They automatically adjust based on the environment that you are in. These hearing aids are most successful when fit in both ears.

5. Prevention of Auditory Deprivation

As the saying goes "if you don't use it, you lose it". If you only wear one hearing aid, only that hearing nerve gets stimulated with sound. The auditory nerve of the opposite ear does not get stimulated and can therefore deteriorate. This does not mean that your hearing will get worse in the unaided ear, however the deteriorating nerve can cause distortion of speech.

6. Ease of Listening and Balance

People with hearing loss will often find themselves avoiding certain situation and withdrawing from social events. Hearing loss can cause stress and fatigue from the strain of trying to hear and understand speech. Hearing with both ears helps the brain to hear more clearly and requires less strain therefore resulting in less fatigue. Hearing from both ears also gives you a sense of balance.

7. Tinnitus Masking

Many people with hearing loss report tinnitus, a ringing in the ears or head. The use of hearing aids often helps to mask the tinnitus using natural environmental sounds. If you are using only one hearing aid, the tinnitus will be masked only in the aided ear. The tinnitus will still be apparent in the ear without the hearing aid. My best advice would be to follow the recommendations of your Audiologist or hearing care provider. Our years of training and experience will help us make appropriate recommendations that will work for you. Our hearing aids are fit with a month trial period, which allows you to wear two hearing aids for one month so you can experience for yourself the benefit of wearing two hearing aids versus only one hearing aid.

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