

# Hearing Aids Don't Work.....Or Do They?

By Stephen O. Frazier, Hearing Loss Support Specialist

Thinking about hearing aids but a friend said, “I tried them – hearing aids don't work”? Ask around a little more, there are millions of people wearing hearing aids daily. Why do that if they don't work?

Many who say they don't work possibly had expectations that were too high. Hearing aids won't restore hearing to “normal”. They'll improve your hearing, allowing you to hear some sounds better than without them. They'll work better in some settings than others. They'll often improve your ability to understand what's being said to you.

You'll see inexpensive hearing devices advertised in various places making wild claims to their effectiveness.. They'll look like hearing aids but they're not. They can't even legally be called hearing aids. Those devices only make all sounds louder, they're miniature loudspeakers stuck in your ears. Hearing aids can be “tuned” to match your hearing loss. They provide greater amplification to those frequencies you don't hear well. On certain settings they provide no amplification to sound in the ranges not normally used in speech. Those other devices just make everything louder so if its the very high frequencies you don't hear well, you won't hear them with those things either – the lower, stronger frequencies just cover them and you'll be hearing but not understanding.

Hearing aids work better for some things than others. You'll hear better on the telephone - especially if your hearing aids have telecoils. Hearing aids will to help if you have trouble conversing with friends in your living room. For hearing and understanding in noisy restaurants you'll still have trouble (though maybe a little less) with hearing aids. If you can't understand the dialog in a production at Popejoy, you probably still won't with hearing aids – you'll need to borrow a headset or neck loop at their lobby information booth to do so. Those situations simply mean that you're expecting too much from hearing aids – not that they don't work.

It's quite possible that “don't work” friend was among those who buy hearing aids, try them for a week and put them in their night stand, never again to see the light of day. Those hearing aids didn't have a chance to show that they do work. It can take weeks, even months, for the mind to adjust to the sound of hearing aids. Having been deprived of the full spectrum of sound for the probably eight to ten years you debated before buying hearing aids, you may find the sudden auditory load more than just a little unpleasant. Give it time and you'll adjust to hearing things again that you possibly had not heard in years.

Health insurance companies don't want to admit it but hearing aids are a prosthetic device just like an artificial leg. A person with a prosthesis needs time to learn to walk with it or do whatever that new device is intended to do. The same goes for hearing aids – give them time.

The “don't worker” very possibly never went back for a follow up – or whatever number it took – visit for adjustments after the hearing aids were dispensed. Any conscientious service provider is going to ask you to wear your new hearing aids for a week or so and then come back to discuss the experience.

Adjustments to the settings of your hearing aids will probably result. The volume may be adjusted, telecoils activated - a whole list of tweaks that can be made to those miniature computers now worn in or behind your ears to personalize their operation to your specific needs. It could take many such visits before you're both satisfied that they're set right for you.

If, after wearing them faithfully for a reasonable time, making and keeping the appointments for follow up visits, and having reasonable expectations, you decide your friend was right and “hearing aids don't work” - at least for you - take them back for a refund.

State licensing regulations require all hearing aid vendors to give you a 45 day trial period during which time you can return the devices for a full or partial refund. Some of the more enlightened offices offer up to 90 days and a full refund.

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