

Hearing Loss Management: Choosing the Right Hearing Aids

Choosing and getting the right hearing aids might be a tough decision for some. This article will explain the process of getting hearing aids and how to choose the right ones for you. You are not alone in this journey and your healthcare providers will guide you throughout this process.

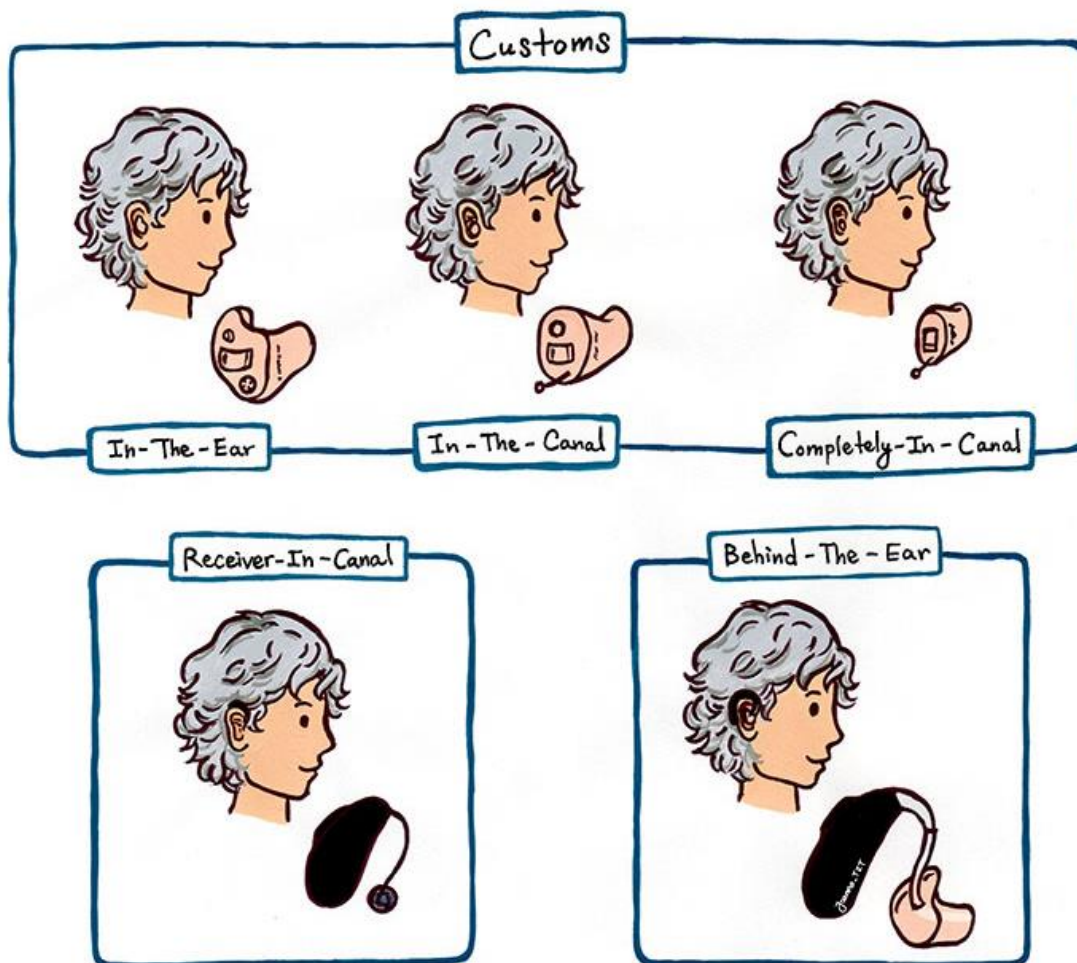
Before seeing an audiologist to try out hearing aids, a hearing test will be conducted and an ENT doctor will assess you to ensure that you are medically eligible for hearing aids. Next, our triage staff will provide you with a brief explanation on the price and styles of the different hearing aids, as well as funding options available. They will then help you to book an appointment to see an audiologist for a hearing aid evaluation session.

During the hearing aid evaluation session, the audiologist will provide detailed information on your hearing test results, how hearing aids work, its function and limitations of the different styles of hearing aids available, and how to manage them. You can then try on different brands of hearing aids before deciding on the most suitable option for you. The audiologist will also answer any questions you might have about hearing loss and hearing aids, as well as address any concerns or feedback about hearing aid devices.

In general, there are 3 main types/styles of hearing aids. These are:

1. custom hearing aids that sit inside the ear;
2. receiver in the canal (RIC) hearing aids that sit behind the ear;
3. behind the ear (BTE) hearing aids that are larger than RICs which sit behind the ear as well.

Each style has their pros and cons, some of which will be covered later in this article.



Some styles have rechargeable options. Rechargeable hearing aids offer an environmentally friendly alternative since less single-use battery waste is generated, and provides ease of management for those who find it inconvenient to handle small batteries. However, there is also merit to non-rechargeable hearing aids, such as having the ability to bring and change out the batteries on the go when needed. There is also no need to worry about not being able to charge the hearing aid should the charger break down. Hence there is no best option, but it depends on each person's preference and lifestyle.

To help decide on the style of hearing aids best suited for you, your audiologist will discuss with you several important points of consideration including (but not limited to):

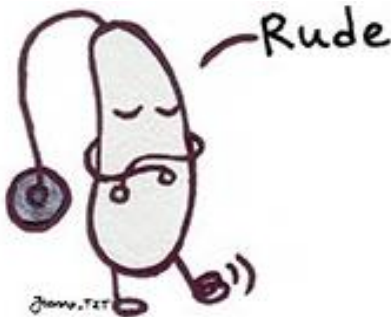
1. Past or recurring ear infections
2. Type and severity of hearing loss
3. Lifestyle, listening needs and daily listening environments
4. Any vision and/or dexterity considerations.
5. Ability to manage hearing aids or availability of a caretaker to help manage the hearing aids
6. Budget
7. Additional streaming capabilities or accessories for the hearing aids. (e.g. if you are comfortable with more advanced technology or prefer simpler options).
8. The paediatric population



Before we jump in to some of the above points, let's clarify some common myths about hearing aids with RICKY the RIC hearing aid.

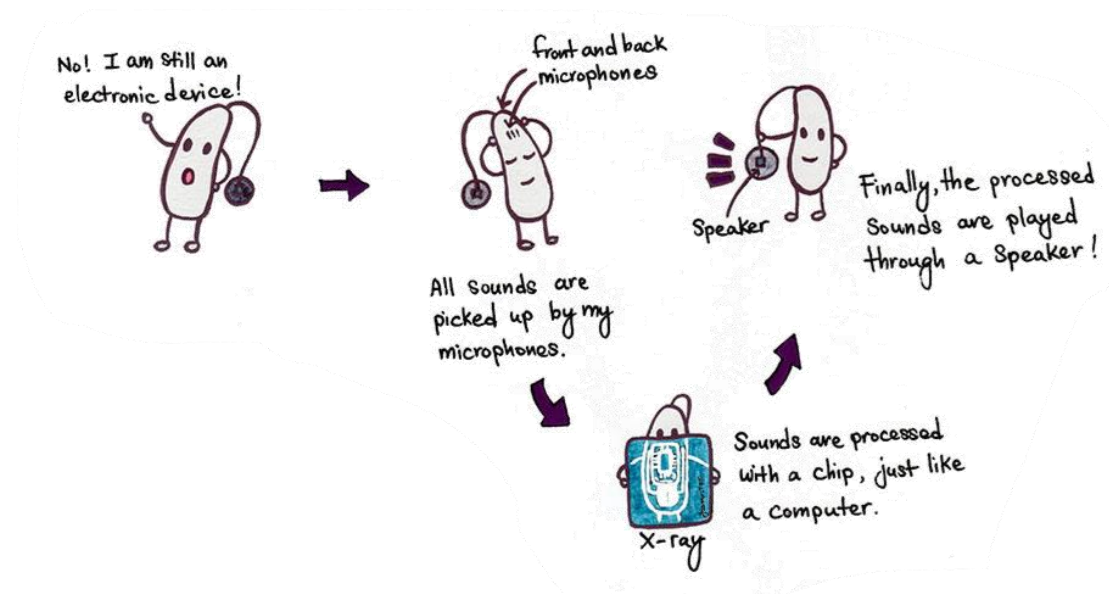
Common myths

Myth: Hearing aids are noisy.



Fact: Over the duration of your hearing loss, your brain would gradually forget how noisy our world can be. With consistent use of hearing aids at all waking hours, your brain will slowly learn to get used to hearing environmental sounds once again.

Myth: Hearing aids will restore my hearing back to normal.



Fact: As described by RICKY, hearing aids utilise electronic microphones and speakers to deliver sounds amplified according to your hearing loss. Hence the hearing aid provides the amplification that you need, but it does not restore your hearing back to normal.

Myth: Hearing loss comes with age and only occurs amongst the elderly.

Fact: Hearing loss can be caused by various reasons and can occur at any age, even at birth.

Myth: The smaller the hearing aid, the more expensive it is.

Fact: Not true! The cost of hearing aids is largely determined by how technologically advanced they are.



Myth: I cannot wear my hearing aids outside when it is raining.

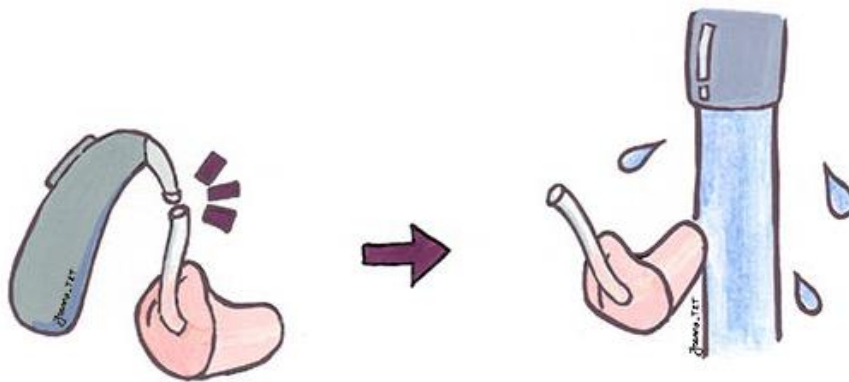
Fact: You can wear your hearing aids out in the rain provided you have an umbrella or are sheltered.

Now that we have some of these myths debunked, let's discuss some factors to consider when selecting hearing aids:

1. Past or recurring ear infections

If you experience frequent ear discharge at random moments, we generally recommend BTE hearing aids.

With BTEs, the custom-made silicone/acrylic earmold can be detached and washed should the discharge flow into the earmold sound bore (the hole where sound passes through) and cause blockage. The earmold can be easily reattached back to the hearing aid body once dried.

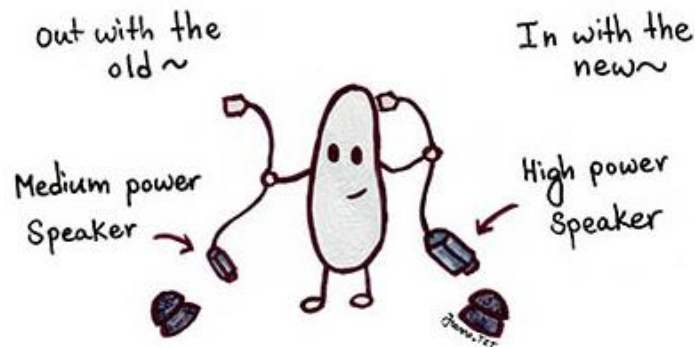


However, other styles of hearing aids such as RICs and customs have an electronic speaker sitting directly inside the ear canal. If ear discharge flows into the speaker, it will not only cause a blockage, but the speaker would easily break down and need to be replaced.

2. Severity and type of hearing loss

In general, the more severe the hearing loss, the larger the speaker of the hearing aid has to be to allow for sufficient amplification. With larger speakers, the hearing aid itself will usually be larger in size. Hence BTEs are usually more suitable for severe to profound levels of hearing loss as they can have more powerful speakers.

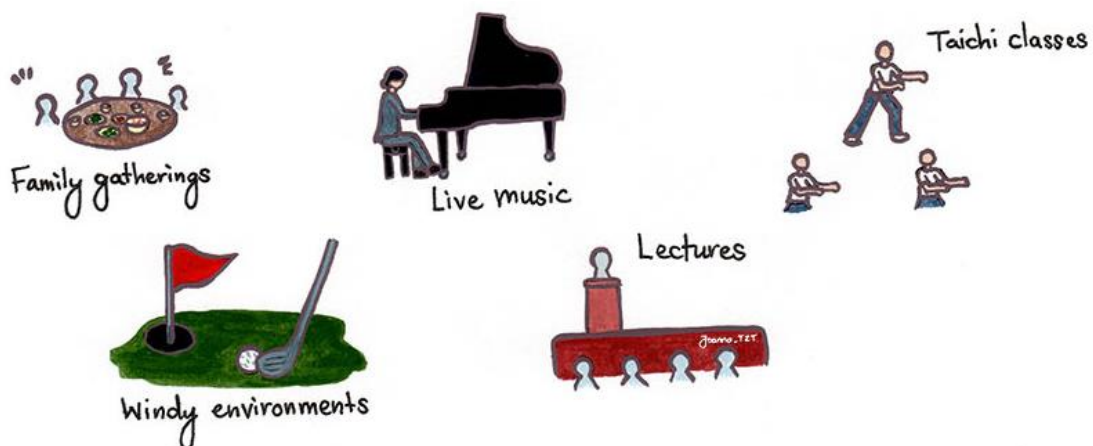
As for RICs, the speaker unit is detachable and interchangeable from the hearing aid body (the part that sits behind the ear). So it is more versatile should there be a need to either increase or decrease the power of the speaker when required.



This feature of RICs would be useful in cases such as progressive hearing loss where you expect your hearing to worsen in future. Sounds confusing? Fret not; our audiologist will advise you accordingly on the most suitable styles should you have a progressive or fluctuating hearing loss.

3. Lifestyle, listening needs and daily listening environments

It is important for our audiologist to know what your daily listening situations are like. Hence, they will ask you questions on your daily activities so that he/she can best recommend the hearing aid style and technology most suited to your needs.

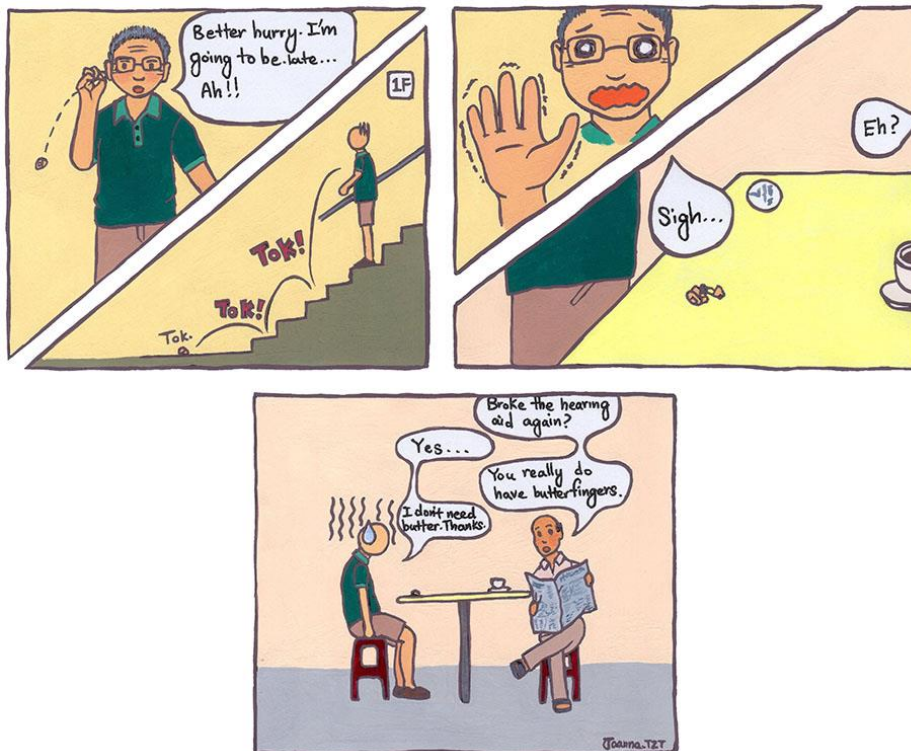


Some examples of listening situations that audiologists tend to take into consideration include (but is not limited to):

- Attending work meetings in large groups.
- Communicating with others in noisy places on a daily basis.
- Participating in sports classes or exercising outdoors frequently.
- Teaching in a classroom setting.
- Mainly spending time at home and mostly communicating with family members.

4. Ability to manage hearing aids: vision or dexterity considerations, caretaker availability

If you have poor vision and/or dexterity issues that make it challenging to handle smaller hearing aids, you may consider larger styles in order to help you manage the hearing aids independently. However, if you have loved ones or a caretaker to help you manage them, you can also consider smaller hearing aids (if your hearing profile is suited for smaller hearing aids).






5. Budget

It is a misconception that smaller hearing aids are more expensive and/or more advanced in terms of technology. Just like our computers and televisions, hearing aids have also reduced in size over the years due to advancements in technology.

However, physical appearance does not determine the cost of the hearing aids. The cost depends on the technology level of the electrical components within the hearing aid itself. This is similar to how electronic tablets look similar on the outside, but differing internal features such as processing speed of the computer chip and memory size result in different pricing.

So it is possible to have hearing aids that look exactly the same on the outside, but one hearing aid can cost \$1500, while the other costs \$5000 based on their differing technological levels.

For example

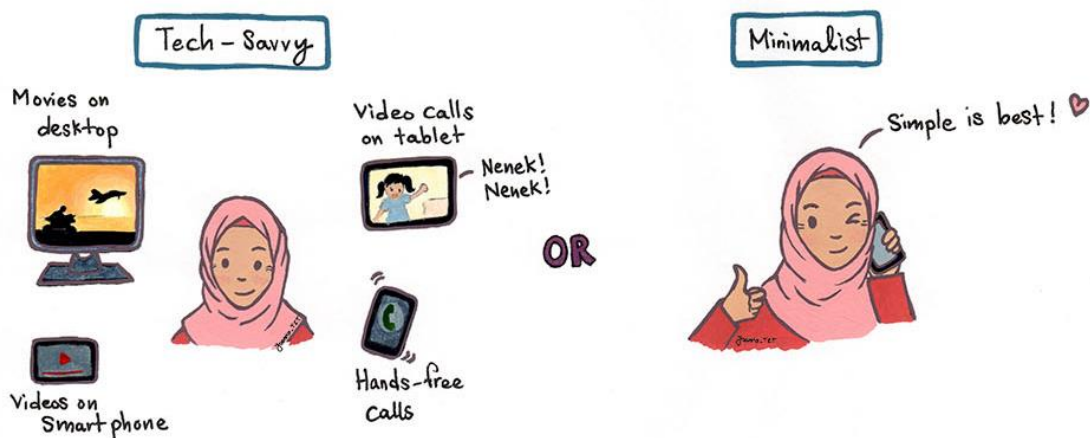
Platform	Technology level	Styles & price
YH	2A (entry level)	
YH	3A (middle level)	
YH	4A (premium level)	

There are also government subsidies available such as the Senior Mobility Fund for those aged 60 and above. Such funding options are subjected to means testing and/or information retrieved from government databases regarding your financial situation.

6. Additional streaming capabilities or accessories: technology savvy or the minimalist.

Most hearing aids today have Bluetooth streaming capabilities. Depending on the brand and model of your mobile phone, calls and audio can either be streamed directly from your phone to the hearing aids (some models support hands-free phone calls), or via a small streaming device that can be clipped onto your clothing. Such Bluetooth streaming capabilities also apply to devices such as laptops, computers, tablets and smart televisions with Bluetooth technology.

Such features are useful today given that we are doing more virtual calls for meetings, classes, conferences, family gatherings, consultations and work.



These features are optional, and the hearing aids will still work well if one prefers to keep things simple. Phone calls can still be answered normally, and one can still watch television without

additional streaming while wearing the hearing aids. Either way, your audiologist will check on your needs and discuss the options best suited for you.

7. The paediatric population

Hearing loss is also prevalent amongst the younger population. For babies born with hearing loss, we need to consider that their ears will continue to grow in size as they gradually grow older. BTEs are normally considered for our paediatric population as new earmolds can be made and attached to the BTE hearing aids as the child grows older. Additionally, the earmolds provide better retention on the child's ears as they play and learn alongside their peers.

With a better idea about what to consider when choosing the right hearing aids for you, we hope this will give you the confidence and encouragement to take the first step towards managing your hearing loss. Our audiologists will be happy to answer any other questions you may have during your hearing aid evaluation appointment.

Written and illustrated by Tang Zhi Ting Joanna (Audiologist)