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Digital Hearing Aids

Digital hearing aids are taking over the current hearing aid market. Providing better, more customized sound quality, these digital options are constantly changing the way we help you hear! If you recently were diagnosed with hearing loss and were told that hearing aids were a good option, you may be anxious about whether this really is a good choice for you. Many people may associate hearing aids with negative memories of a grandparent or an older friend who had aids that were HUGE and squealed all the time. Not to worry, today's digital options are sleek and more technologically sophisticated. In the past all hearing aids were analog, and were not as small or as customizable as today's digital hearing instruments.

Analog vs. Digital

Analog hearing aids are simply amplifiers. Some small adjustments to pitch and loudness can be made with analogs, but these hearing aids are very limited. With analog aids, sound is taken in, processed electrically and then sent, amplified, to your ear.

Digital instruments, however, use computer processing. Sound is converted into digital codes that are more easily altered to custom fit the user's hearing loss and preferences. This also means that the hearing aids can be adjusted to amplify less noise! Better sound quality can be made by very specific modifications to the computer chip in the hearing aid. A digital hearing aid contains various bands, channels, and often memories.

Bands are frequency (pitch) ranges that can be individually adjusted. The more sophisticated the hearing aid is, the greater number of bands will be available for modification. Adjustment of these bands allows the audiologist or hearing specialist to adjust hearing aids to a user's hearing loss. For example, a person may have more hearing loss in the high pitches, band adjustment will allow for greater amplification at high pitches, with less at low and mid pitches.

Channels allow compression settings to be adjusted in specific frequency (pitch) ranges. Compression is what limits a hearing aid from over-amplifying certain pitches. For example, a hearing aid can be set so that if your waitress drops a tray of glass plates in front of your table, the sound will not be so suddenly loud and (possibly) painful to your ears. Instead there will be a limit to how much the hearing aid will amplify.

Use of computer processing also allows for multiple "memories" or programs a hearing aid may have. Each program can be set to a different need. Perhaps you coach football at a local high school. Practices and games may be a little noisier than at home. You may have one program for quiet settings (like home) and another for those noisier situations (like practice and games) that amplifies less. These changes can be automatic or may require a simple push of a button. Only a few or many programs may be available, depending on your digital level.

Ready for Digital?

Discuss your hearing aid options with your hearing healthcare professional today. Analog hearing aids are still appropriate and a more cost-effective option for some. Digital technology, however, provides great sound quality and is often the better choice. Your audiologist or hearing specialist will be able to help you make the decision about digital hearing aids today!

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