

Now Hear This

What You Should Know About Custom Hearing Aids

by Catherine Jons, Au.D.

(NAPSA)—If you or someone you care about is among the nearly 40 million Americans the National Institutes of Health estimates could hear better, you may be thinking about hearing aids.

Hearing Helpers

For many, however, deciding what style they want can be daunting and the terminology confusing. One reason is that the hearing care industry sometimes uses different names or acronyms to refer to similar hearing aid models. Behind-the-ear (BTE) and receiver-in-canal (RIC) hearing aids are pretty self-explanatory—BTE housings contain all the working components and sit behind your ear, while receiver-in-canal housings contain everything but the receiver, which sits in the opening of your ear canal and connects to housing behind the ear. In contrast, figuring out which styles are grouped under the umbrella category of custom hearing aids can pose more of a challenge.

Why They're Called Customs

Custom hearing aids fit inside your ear and so have to be custom made according to the shape and size of your ear canal. Customs have traditionally required your hearing care professional to make impressions of your ear canals using a moldable compound. The molds are then sent to a manufacturer that tailors each hearing aid to fit comfortably inside your ears. The downside of this process is that it takes time.

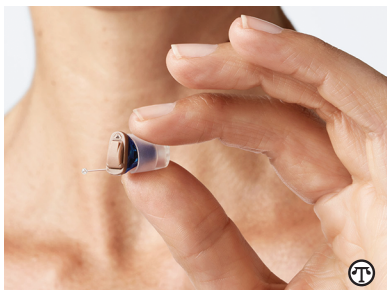
Most people choose customs because they provide a comfortable fit coupled with the utmost in discretion. Unless people get very close to your ear, they won't notice you're wearing hearing aids at all, which is a big plus to many wearers. Also, despite their smaller size, some customs offer almost as many beneficial features as BTE or RIC models, including tinnitus therapy signals, wireless connectivity and directionality.

Whether your hearing care professional recommends a custom hearing aid depends on your degree of hearing loss, comfort level with wearing something inside your ears, desired features and other hearing and lifestyle considerations.

What's Available

Styles and sizes of custom hearing aids include:

- **In-the-ear (ITE)** hearing aids fit inside the "bowls" of your outer ears. The op-



A tiny device that's almost impossible to see when it's working can make it much easier to hear.

tions are full shell, which completely fills the bowl-shaped region, and half shell, which fills the lower part of the bowl only.

- **In-the-canal (ITC)** hearing aids fit partly inside your ear canal, making them even less visible than ITEs. They're suitable for people with mild to moderate hearing loss.
- **Completely-in-the-canal (CIC)** hearing aids are very small and fit entirely inside your ear canal for even greater discretion. They come with small extension cords you can use to pull them out of your ear for cleaning and maintenance. They are also suitable for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss.
- **Invisible-in-the-canal (IIC)** hearing aids are the tiniest currently available. They're nearly invisible when worn and made to fit deep inside your ear canal (past the second bend and close to your eardrum). IICs also include a cord for insertion and removal and treat mild to moderate hearing loss.
- **Ready-to-wear customs** are the latest innovation in custom hearing aids. The Silk™ ready-to-wear CIC combines the speed and convenience associated with BTE or RIC hearing aids with the discretion and comfort of CICs. Unlike with other customs, you don't need to have molds taken of your ear canal nor do they have to be sent out for a custom build. Instead, a soft Click Sleeve lets your hearing care professional fit them inside your ear and send them home with you the same day.

Learn More

For further facts on hearing better, go to www.signiausa.com.

• *Dr. Jons is an Educational Specialist with more than 25 years of successful programming experience.*