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# Hearing aid service

## What adult hearing services does Addenbrooke's provide?

The audiology department provides a comprehensive hearing aid service including several specialist clinics, seeing patients through each stage of their treatment from the initial assessment of hearing status to the hearing aid fitting and follow-up care. The department mainly fits the latest digital 'behind-the-ear' hearing aids. Specialist devices such as CROS/ BiCROS hearing aids and 'in-the-ear' hearing aids can be provided if there is a medical reason to do so.

The Department works mainly from Addenbrooke's Hospital with peripheral clinics also held at Newmarket Community Hospital, Saffron Walden Community Hospital and the Princess of Wales Hospital, Ely. All enquiries or requests to be seen at a peripheral clinic should be made to Addenbrooke's Hospital.

A limited domiciliary (home) visit service is also available, whereby patients who are totally housebound may be eligible to be visited at home or in their nursing home for their hearing aid appointments. Contact the Audiology Department in the first instance with any enquiries regarding this service.

## What is hearing loss, what causes it and what treatment is available?

Hearing loss is a common condition effecting almost 9 million people in the UK (Action on Hearing loss 2011). Approximately 28% of people who are hearing impaired are under 60 years old, and 72% are over 60 years old.

Hearing impairment is defined by the quietest level of sounds you can hear, known as your hearing threshold, and is measured in decibels (dB). These hearing thresholds are used to categorise your hearing as normal (no impairment), mild, moderate, severe or profound impairment. Typical complaints for a patient with a mild hearing loss include sometimes having difficulty following speech, particularly in noisy situations. People with moderate deafness may have difficulty following speech without a hearing aid. Severe and profound hearing loss patients usually need to lip-read or use sign language, even with a hearing aid.

There are many causes of hearing loss, with age being the biggest single cause of hearing

impairment. There are two types of hearing loss: conductive and sensorineural.

A conductive hearing loss is caused by a problem with the outer or middle ear which prevents sounds passing to the inner ear properly, for example if there is too much ear wax.

A sensorineural hearing loss is caused by a problem with the inner ear or hearing nerves, such as noise damage to the cochlea.

Sometimes, hearing impairment can have both conductive and sensorineural causes. During your visit to Addenbrookes Audiology the audiologist will test your hearing to measure the quietest levels of sound you can hear and help to diagnose which type of hearing impairment you have.

## What to expect at your appointment

### Hearing assessment

A typical hearing assessment lasts up to 1 hour. The audiologist will take a detailed history from you, recording your hearing difficulties and lifestyle. A hearing test will be performed where you wear some earphones and listen to sounds at different tones and levels. You will be asked to indicate if you have heard the tones by pressing a button. You may also have a test to check how well you can hear spoken words by simply repeating short words spoken at different levels. The results of your hearing tests will be used by the audiologist to help you decide what the best treatment option for the particular hearing difficulties you have. If you require a hearing aid we might take some impressions of your ear(s) to make an ear mould, although some people with mild hearing loss may be able to use a soft open ear piece called an open fitting that doesn't require an ear mould. We will then arrange an appointment to have the hearing aid(s) fitted.

### Hearing aid fitting

A hearing aid fitting appointment takes approximately 1 hour. The

audiologist will check the fit of your ear mould (or open fitting) and ensure that it is comfortable. We then make several recordings of the hearing aid to ensure that it is working to the correct levels for your hearing loss and that you are happy with the way the hearing aid sounds. The audiologist will show you how the hearing aid works and how to look after it. At the fitting appointment you will be given several leaflets which contain all the information you need to help you look after your hearing aid and where you can get support if you are

having problems. If appropriate the audiologist will arrange for a follow up appointment to check how you are getting on with your new hearing aid.

How to use your new hearing aid

## **More information about looking after your NHS hearing aid:**

If you would like to be assessed for a hearing aid and do not already have one, visit your general practitioner (GP) who can refer for a hearing assessment. This will either be carried out at Addenbrooke's Hospital or possibly a different location dependent on your eligibility criteria (see below). In some cases your GP may refer you to an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) clinic for a medical opinion before you can be assessed for a hearing aid. The ENT clinic will then refer you to the Audiology Department if appropriate.

If you are already an Audiology patient at Addenbrooke's and you feel your hearing has worsened you should contact the Audiology Department directly by telephone or letter and a reassessment appointment can be made if appropriate.

## **Cambridge Adult Hearing Services (CAHS)**

Patients over 50 years of age with straightforward age-related hearing loss are suitable for the CAHS service. They will not be seen by Addenbrooke's but will instead be seen by another provider, currently Specsavers. They can expect the same high quality service regardless of where they are seen. People who do not meet the referral criteria or those with specialist hearing needs will continue to attend Addenbrooke's Hospital. If you are unsure whether you should be seen by CAHS or Addenbrooke's, please phone Addenbrooke's Audiology department for advice.