

Learn About Hearing Series:

Becoming Friends with Your New Hearing Aids

Neil G. Bauman, Ph.D.

Center for
Hearing Loss Help

1013 Ridgeway Drive,
Lynden, WA 98264-1057
Phone: (360) 778-1266
FAX: (360) 389-5226
E-mail: info@hearinglosshelp.com
Web site: <https://hearinglosshelp.com>

Becoming Friends with Your New Hearing Aids

More articles in the series:

***Everything You Wanted to Know About Your Hearing Loss But Were Afraid to Ask
(Because You Knew You Wouldn't Hear the Answers Anyway!)***

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Becoming Friends with Your New Hearing Aids

A person asked, “My audiologist did not adequately prepare me for the challenges I would face in adjusting to wearing my new hearing aids. What is the best way to adapt to wearing hearing aids?”

Good question. Let’s go right back to the beginning. Far too often, people have unrealistic expectations as they anticipate hearing again with their new hearing aids. For many people, the scenario goes something like this.

The big day arrives. You are excited. You should be. Today you are going to hear again! Today you will receive brand new hearing aids.

Your audiologist carefully fits and adjusts them to meet your special hearing needs. She tests you with them to be sure you hear as well as possible. You are thrilled to hear her voice so clearly with your new aids.

You proudly walk out of her office. You are now on your own with your new “ears.” You look forward to a hearing adventure.

You leave the building and step out into the street. Suddenly a horrible cacophony of sounds assaults your ears. You are shocked right out of your socks! You don’t ever remember traffic being this noisy. You can’t stand the awful racket. Quickly you reach up and yank your hearing aids out of your ears and stuff them into your pocket—and your dream of hearing again is shattered.

Please Don't Dump Me in Your Drawer

If this has been your experience, you are certainly not alone. Close to 1,000,000 hard of hearing people in the USA have done the same. In fact, one in every six to eight hearing aids sold today soon lie neglected and forgotten in dresser drawers.

To the above, add the enormous numbers of hard of hearing people who only drag their hearing aids out for certain special occasions. The rest of the time their hearing aids also languish in pockets and purses or get dumped back into dresser drawers.

This is a tragedy. Hearing aids designed to live in people's ears too often are denied the opportunity to help their owners hear better. Why do people pay good money—up to \$3,000.00 for each hearing aid—and then not wear them? Even more to the point, what should people be doing so that they will become successful users of hearing aids? Here are some answers.

Have Realistic Expectations of What Your Hearing Aids Will Do for You

Before you are even fitted for new hearing aids, you need to have realistic expectations of what hearing aids will and will not do for you.

1. Hearing Aids Will Not Give You Normal Hearing

Hearing aids are **aids** to better hearing. They are not cures for hearing loss. Hearing aids will typically reduce your hearing loss to about **half** of what it was before. This means that for those of us with significant hearing losses, at **best**, we will still have mild to moderate hearing losses. Thus, if you expect normal hearing, you will be sadly disappointed. However, if you expect to hear better, you will be pleased with your new hearing aids—particularly in quiet situations.

If you set your expectations too high, you may be so disillusioned that you may toss your hearing aids in some dresser drawer and forget about them.

For example, one elderly lady was fitted with hearing aids that allowed her to hear and understand about 95% of what people were saying. After 4 weeks, she returned the hearing aids to her audiologist and asked for a refund. Why? Because she was upset that she was still missing 5%!

She consigned herself to a life of frustration and silence, because she focused on the 5% she missed rather than on the whopping 95% she now could hear.

2. It Takes Time to Adjust to Wearing Hearing Aids

It comes as a shock to many people that they need time to adjust to wearing hearing aids. They think that adjusting to wearing new hearing aids should be like putting on new glasses—instant clear sight.

The truth is, you need to give your brain time to relearn how to hear and process all the new sounds it is now hearing—especially if your hearing loss was gradual. You gradually lost certain sounds. Now, when you put on hearing aids, all of a sudden these sounds blast your ears and you are overwhelmed.

It takes time for you to get reacquainted with the sounds you haven't heard well for decades. This does not happen in a day or even a week. Your brain needs from 30 to 90 days or even longer to complete this process—so if you give up before this time, you will think hearing aids don't work for you and you could be very wrong.

3. Everything Is Too Loud Now

One of the biggest shocks people experience when wearing new hearing aids is how loud everyday sounds now seem. The toilet flushing thunders like Niagara Falls! Clinking cutlery sounds like jackhammers. Initially, you may find you cannot stand rustling papers, running water and other everyday sounds.

However, with time, your brain will learn to turn down its internal volume control so these sounds become bearable. This is another reason you need to persevere during those first 90 days. Unfortunately, many people give up before this happens. If they had kept using their hearing aids a little longer, they would have succeeded.

People with sensorineural hearing losses also often suffer from recruitment. Recruitment is the perception that sounds increase in volume faster than they really do. Thus, if you ask a person to speak up and they raise their voice, it may seem like they are now **shouting at you**.

Recruitment is the result of a reduced **dynamic range**—that area between the softest sound you can hear and the loudest sound you can stand. Hearing aids need to amplify all sounds so that you can hear them, yet must not amplify them so much that you perceive the louder sounds as painful.

Typically, the greater your hearing loss, the worse your recruitment. Thus, you need to get hearing aids that have good wide dynamic range compression circuitry built in. This compression needs to be set properly for your hearing loss, or loud sounds will “blow the top of your head off.” At least that is the way it feels.

Sounds that recruit may seem **far** too loud, but in reality, this is only your **perception** of them. In truth, they are not so loud that they are damaging your ears.

4. Hearing Aids Cannot Fix Fuzzy or Distorted Hearing

When you lose your hearing, you not only hear sounds softer, but also speech now sounds fuzzy or distorted. This is because typically you lose most of your hearing in the high frequencies. It is these higher frequencies that give speech much of its intelligence. If your ears can no longer hear these frequencies no matter how much these sounds are amplified, hearing aids will not bring clarity to your fuzzy hearing world.

However, if you still have some high frequency hearing, digital aids can be adjusted to specifically amplify these higher frequencies much more than the lower frequencies you typically hear reasonably well. This will help you hear clearer speech once again. It will not be perfect—so don’t expect that—but it will be better.

5. Hearing Aids Do Not Let You Hear Well in Noise

Hearing aids work best in quiet situations when you are only 3 to 8 feet from the speaker. In noise, or at greater distances, hearing aids alone typically do not work well. In fact, not being able to hear in noise is one of the most common complaints of hearing aid users. The truth is, you may hear **worse** in noise than you do without wearing your hearing aids. For this you just spent \$4,000.00?

If you live or work in noisy environments, make sure your hearing aids have good noise suppression circuitry. You will also find that to hear effectively in noise, you will likely need to couple your hearing aids with various assistive listening devices.

Unfortunately, few people even know that assistive technology exists, so they don’t insist on having the specific features they need built into their hearing aids in order to couple to this technology.

6. You May Not be Ready Psychologically

Wearing hearing aids before you are ready psychologically is a sure way to fail. You first have to grieve for your hearing loss (i.e. work through the stages of denial, anger,

bargaining, and depression before reaching the acceptance stage). It is only when you reach the acceptance stage that you are finally ready to do all you can to help yourself hear better—which includes wearing hearing aids. If you are still in the denial or depression stages, you will not give hearing aids a fair trial before relegating them to the dresser drawer. (See the next chapter “Grieving for Your Hearing Loss.”)

Get the Right Hearing Aids and Features

In order to become friends with your new hearing aids, you need hearing aids that are friendly to you and your lifestyle in the first place. “Friendly” hearing aids have the features you need to hear the best you can with your particular hearing loss.

I recommend getting behind the ear (BTE) hearing aids because they are big enough to contain all the “goodies” you need, have the power you may need, last longer, need fewer repairs and are cheaper. In addition, they are easier to put on, easier to manipulate the controls and easier to find when you put them down.

What “goodies” do you need in your hearing aids? In my opinion, you should **never** buy a hearing aid that does not have a built-in telecoil (sometimes called a T-switch, t-coil or audiocoil). With a telecoil, you can couple effectively to personal amplifiers, FM systems or infrared system via neckloops or silhouettes and to telephones and room loops just via the telecoil. If you have a severe or profound hearing loss, you may also want direct audio input (DAI) capability and/or built-in FM receivers.

If you have to listen to people from a distance or listen when several others are talking, directional microphones can make a big difference. Better yet, get noise-canceling capability combined with directional microphones.

Use Assistive Technology with Your Hearing Aids

Noise and distance are two enemies of hearing aid users. Under these conditions, you need to combine your hearing aids with assistive listening devices such as personal amplifiers, room loops, FM systems and infrared systems. Used together, these devices can turn your hearing aids into super aids.

This is because with these devices, you are effectively moving the microphone from your ears up to the speaker. As a result, you will hear beautiful clear sound in both ears at the same time straight from the speaker’s mouth. At the same time, most of the room noise is blocked out—a definite win-win situation.

Good-bye World of Silence! Successfully Adapting to Wearing Hearing Aids

If you have followed the suggestions outlined above, you now have hearing aids that will best fit your needs. You realize that hearing with them won't be perfect, but you'll hear much better than you do now. What you need to do now is learn how to effectively adjust to wearing your new hearing aids so you won't rip them out of your ears in disgust and throw them in a drawer.

In contrast to the opening scenario where the person attempted to wear his hearing aids home from the Audiologists' office, here is a better way to adjust to wearing them.

Sit down and relax in a quiet place in your home. Put your hearing aids in your ears and turn them on. Talk to yourself while you adjust the volume to a comfortable level.

Listen to the sounds around you. Do you hear the hum of the refrigerator? the creaking of your house? the sounds of a car driving by outside? the rustle of your clothes? Get used to them for they will again be a part of your life.

Learn to feel comfortable with your hearing aids. It's normal that your ears will feel full, (and probably hot and sweaty too) like you have something stuffed in them—because you do. If your ear molds hurt, go back to your audiologist to have them ground down a bit. Wearing hearing aids may feel uncomfortable to some degree, but they should never hurt.

On the first day, wear your hearing aids for only one hour. The second day: two hours, the third day: three hours. After that, add another hour a day until you are comfortable wearing them all the time. If this is too fast for you, just increase the time by a smaller amount, say 30 minutes a day.

To begin with, do not wear your hearing aids in noisy places. You need to be comfortable in quiet places first. Treat yourself to easy listening situations during your first few weeks of adjusting to wearing your hearing aids. Try not to listen to too much too soon. If sounds are too loud, turn your hearing aids down slightly. If your hearing aids begin to bother you, take them off and give yourself a rest. Put them on again later. You need time to get used to wearing them and to hearing sounds again. The key to success is to **make haste slowly**.

Read aloud to yourself. You may be horrified how loud or different your voice sounds. This is normal. Get used to it. This is how you really sound. Slowly you will come to like your "new" voice.

The sound of your phone ringing or the sudden ding-dong of your door bell may startle you. You may jump when doors slam, dogs bark or people cough. This too, is normal.

When you are comfortable hearing your own voice, talk to one other person in a quiet place. Have them sit between 3 and 6 feet from you.

When you are ready, wear your hearing aids outside and listen to the sounds around you. Try to identify birds singing, traffic sounds, rustling leaves, the sounds of your shoes scrunching on the sidewalk. Begin on relatively quiet streets and slowly build up to busy downtown streets.

Finally, but only after you are comfortable wearing your hearing aids in all other situations, are you ready to tackle difficult and noisy listening situations. In crowds and at parties, talk to one person at a time. Don't try to follow everyone at once. If the noise gets to you after a while, seek a quiet place. In restaurants, start with quiet, well-lighted ones. Gradually work up to noisier restaurants as you feel comfortable.

Adjust **slowly** and **consistently** to wearing your new hearing aids. You must be patient for it will take time. Remember, it takes from 30 to 90 days for your brain to adjust to the new sounds it is now hearing.

How well and how fast you adapt to your new electronic ears depends on several factors. These include: how bad your hearing loss is, the type of loss you have, how long you have had the loss, whether it happened gradually over many years or whether it was sudden, and how well your ears can discriminate different sounds.

Adapting to your new hearing aids may take a week or a month or a year—everyone is different. The important thing is to keep at it. Don't compare your progress with others.

If you only have a mild loss, you may adapt to your new aids the first day—it may be love at first sound. If your hearing loss is severe you likely will take much longer to adapt. The same is true if you have had a hearing loss for many years before doing anything about it.

However, when you finally adapt to wearing your hearing aids, something surprising happens. The day will come when you will actually feel undressed unless you are wearing your hearing aids. You realize just how much your hearing aids help you successfully cope in the hearing world. Without realizing it, you and your hearing aids have become close friends indeed!

Addendum

Audiologist Erin Newman, Au.D., is on the ball and goes the second mile to help her patients. She wrote,

A couple of years ago, while searching the Internet for articles I needed for an Au.D. course, I came across your wonderful article entitled: "Becoming Friends with Your New Hearing Aids." I photocopied it, and have given it to all my new hearing aid users ever since.

"Becoming Friends with Your New Hearing Aids" has made a huge difference in hearing aid users understanding and acceptance of their hearing aids' idiosyncrasies. Even though I always verbally explained these, having it written down in a concise, humorous, informative manner by a third party really brought it home for people.

One of my patients had purchased hearing aids a year before at the local hospital, only to return them for a refund in less than a week. I gave her your article to read after her hearing aid evaluation. When she returned two weeks later for the actual fitting, she said, "Wow, why didn't anyone ever explain this to me before? I would have probably given those other hearing aids more time!"

If you are a first time hearing aid wearer, or are considering getting a hearing aid, you need to read and apply this article. It will help you successfully adjust to wearing your new hearing aids as the above story attests.

The original of this article is on the Center's website at <https://hearinglosshelp.com/blog/becoming-friends-with-your-new-hearing-aids/> and the Addendum is at <http://hearinglosshelp.com/blog/becoming-friends-with-your-new-hearing-aids-revisited/>.

Two Good Habits for New Hearing Aid Users

If you are new to wearing hearing aids, you need to learn the best ways to adapt to wearing your new hearing aids. Otherwise you may dump your new hearing aids in a dresser drawer, give up and conclude hearing aids don't work—not to mention wasting all those thousands of dollars you just poured down the drain.

It takes time for both you and your ears/brain to adapt to wearing new hearing aids, especially if you have had a long-standing hearing loss, or if you have a more severe hearing loss. It also takes time to learn all the things you need to know about hearing loss and wearing hearing aids. This just doesn't happen overnight!

For example, if your audiologist turns up the volume on your new hearing aids to where you really need it, a sudden cacophony of sounds you haven't heard for a long time assaults your ears and overloads your brain. That's when you reach up and yank your new hearing aids out of your ears and vow never to wear them again.

The solution is to learn to hear again—slowly. You need to start with your hearing aids set softer than optimum and slowly increase the volume over several weeks as your brain relearns how to deal with our noisy world.

In his article “Good habits pave the road to success” (The Hearing Journal, May, 2010) audiologist Robert Martin explains how he puts this concept into practice. For people new to hearing aids, he deliberately sets the initial gain and output settings low. That way he can, “maximize the comfort of the sound and avoid all types of overload.”

Furthermore, Dr. Martin tells his clients that for the first few weeks they should not to wear their hearing aids in crowds or noisy places. I've been saying these same things for years.

He has another practice that endears him to me and that is, he sees every newly-fitted client once a week for the first 4 or 5 weeks to make sure everything is working properly.

This has some wonderful advantages that I wish all audiologists and hearing aid dispensers would follow.

First, he can deal with any problems as they come up. For example, he can tweak the hearing aids to eliminate any noise sensitivities such as the dog barking, doors slamming, etc. that otherwise might "blow the top of your head off" when these sounds recruit (you perceive them as abnormally loud).

Second, another advantage of this approach is that he can slowly increase the sound output levels to where they need to be as the person's brain adjusts to the increased volume of sounds.

Third, he can answer more of their questions as they come to mind. One of the things that hard of hearing people suffer from at the outset is information overload. They just don't remember all the instructions and guidelines their hearing aid fitters tell them at the time they get their hearing aids. Thus by having his clients come in several times, he spreads this information out over several weeks so it can more easily be assimilated.

The original of this article is on the Center's website at <https://hearinglosshelp.com/blog/two-good-habits-for-new-hearing-aid-users/>.

Good Books on Hearing Loss

Books in the series:

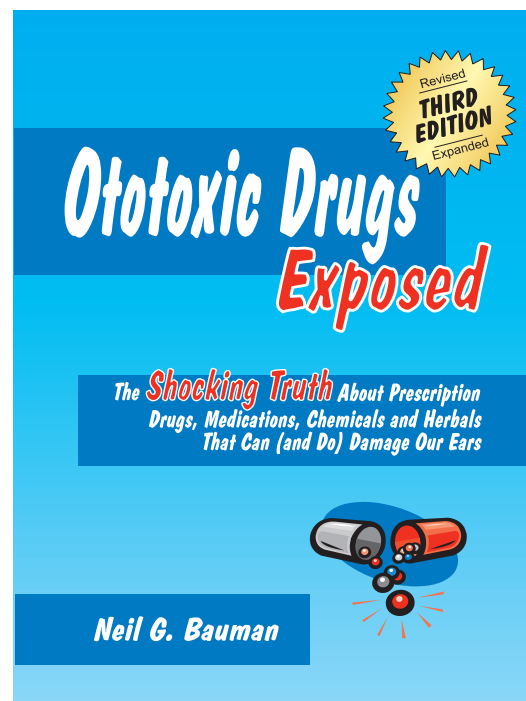
Everything You Wanted to Know About Your Hearing Loss But Were Afraid to Ask (Because You Knew You Wouldn't Hear the Answers Anyway!)

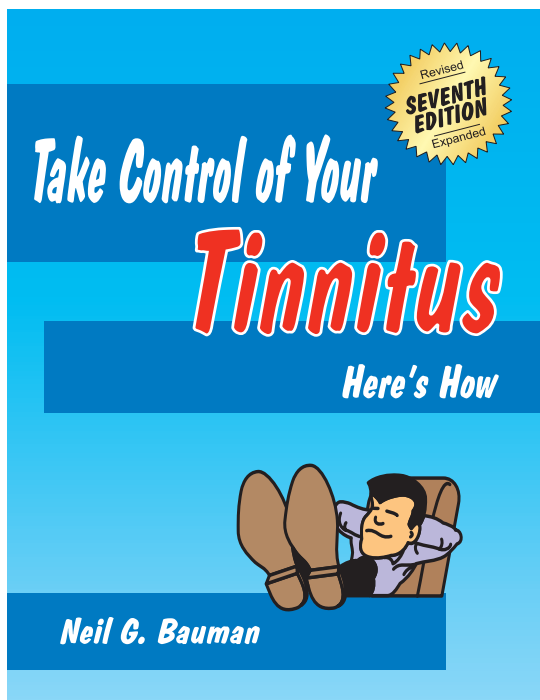
by Neil G. Bauman, Ph.D.

If you have enjoyed these articles and would like to learn more tinnitus or Musical Ear Syndrome, or about hearing loss and how you can successfully live with it, you may be interested in some helpful books by Dr. Neil. Each book is packed with the things you need to know in order to thrive in spite of your various hearing loss issues. To order any of these books, open your browser and go to <https://hearinglosshelp.com/shop/category/books/>.

Ototoxic Drugs Exposed—The Shocking Truth About Prescription Drugs, Medications, Chemicals and Herbals That Can (and Do) Damage Our Ears (\$52.45; eBook \$39.95)

This book, now in its third edition, reveals the shocking truth that many prescription drugs can damage your ears. Some drugs slowly and insidiously rob you of your hearing, cause your ears to ring or destroy your balance. Other drugs can smash your ears in one fell swoop, leaving you with profound, permanent hearing loss and bringing traumatic change into your life. Learn how to protect your ears from the ravages of ototoxic drugs and chemicals. Describes the specific ototoxic effects of 877 drugs, 35 herbals and 148 chemicals (798 pages).



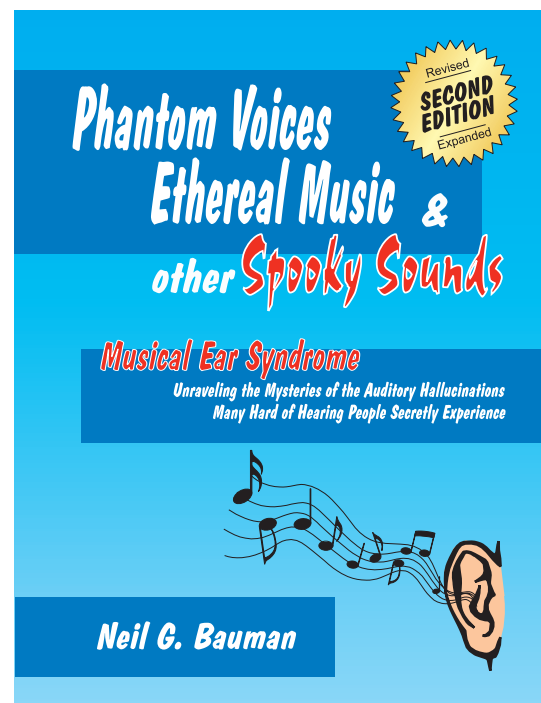


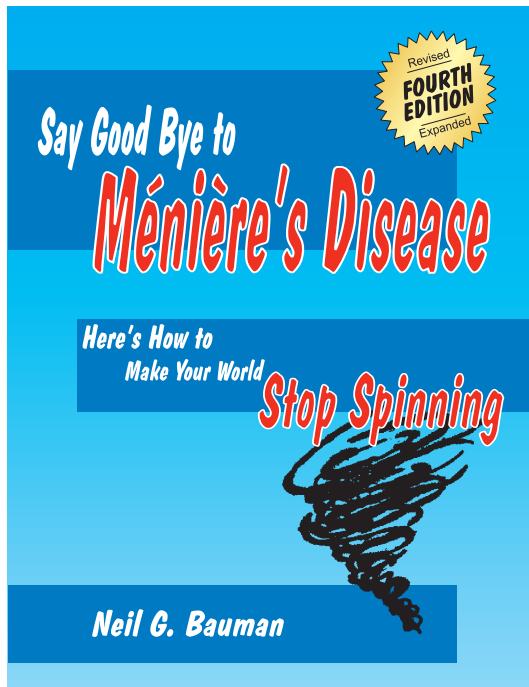
Take Control of Your Tinnitus—Here's How
(\$29.95; eBook \$22.99)

If your ears ring, buzz, chirp, hiss, click or roar, you know just how annoying tinnitus can be. The good news is that you do not have to put up with this racket for the rest of your life. You can take control of your tinnitus. Recent studies show that a lot of what we thought we knew about tinnitus is not true at all. Exciting new research reveals a number of things that you can do to eliminate or greatly reduce the severity of your tinnitus so that it no longer bothers you. This totally-revised, up-to-date and expanded 7th edition contains the very latest in tinnitus research and treatment. In this book you will learn what tinnitus is, what causes tinnitus and things you can do to take control of your tinnitus (356 pages).

Phantom Voices, Ethereal Music & Other Spooky Sounds (\$22.49; eBook \$16.99)

When you realize you are hearing phantom sounds, you immediately think that something has gone dreadfully wrong “upstairs”—that you are going crazy. Because of this, few people openly talk about the strange phantom voices, music, singing and other spooky sounds they hear. This book, the first of its kind in the world, lifts the veil on “Musical Ear syndrome” and reveals numerous first-hand accounts of the many strange phantom sounds people experience. Not only that, it explains what causes these phantom sounds, and more importantly, what you can do to eliminate them, or at least, bring them under control (178 pages).



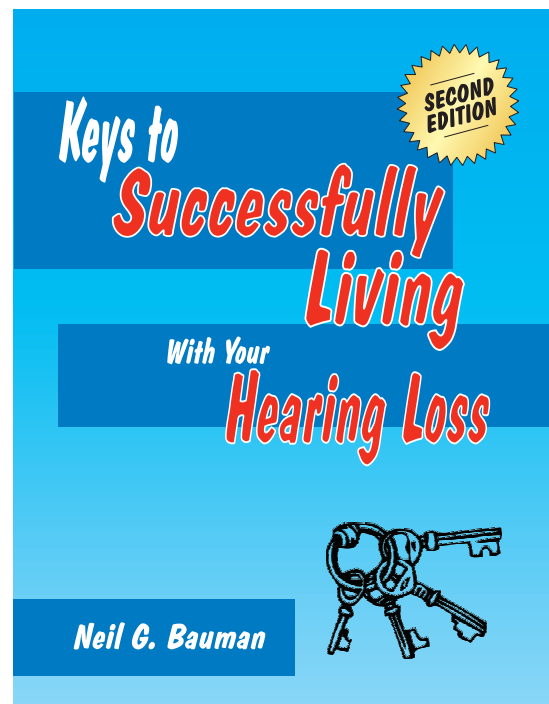


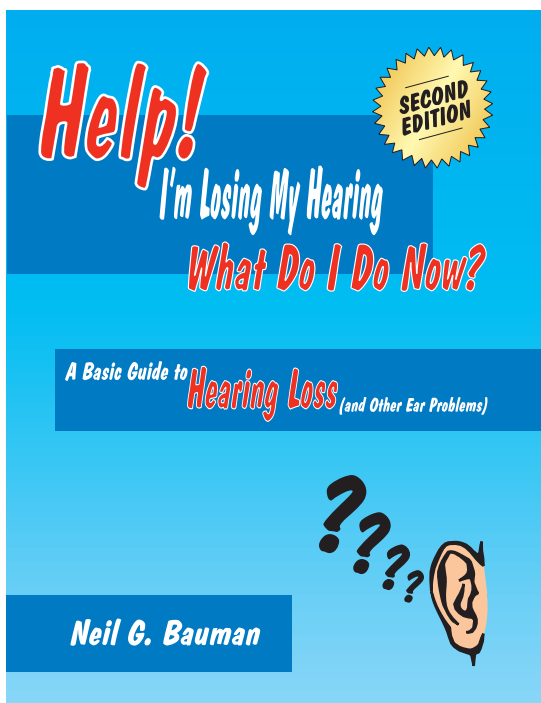
Say Good Bye to Ménière's Disease—Here's How to Make Your World Stop Spinning
(\$21.95; eBook \$16.49)

Ménière's disease is one of the more baffling and incapacitating conditions a person can experience. If you suffer from your world spinning, have a fluctuating hearing loss, tinnitus and a feeling of fullness in your ears, this book is for you. It details what Ménière's disease is like; explains the recent breakthrough into the underlying cause of Ménière's; and shows you how, at last, you can be free from the ravages of this debilitating condition. Each page is packed with practical information to help you successfully conquer your Meniere's disease. Join the hundreds and hundreds of people whose worlds have now stopped spinning (128 pages).

Keys to Successfully Living with Your Hearing Loss (\$19.97; eBook \$15.49)

Do you know: a) the critical missing element to successfully living with your hearing loss? b) that the No. 1 coping strategy hard of hearing people instinctively use is wrong, wrong, wrong? c) what the single most effective hearing loss coping strategy is? d) how you can turn your hearing aids into awesome hearing devices? This book addresses the surprising answers to these and other critical questions. Applying them to your life will put you well on the road to successfully living with your hearing loss (84 pages).



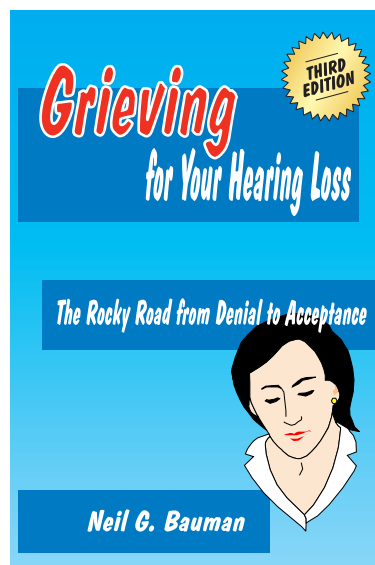


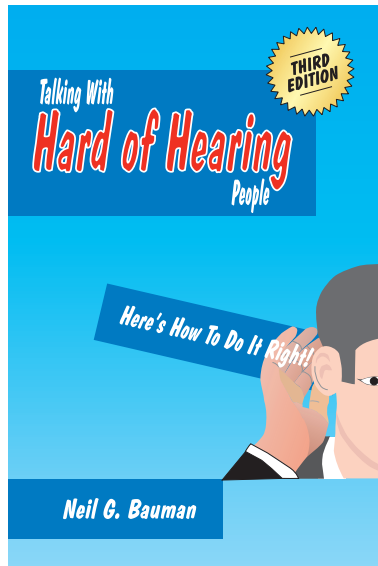
Help! I'm Losing My Hearing—What Do I Do Now? (\$18.95; eBook \$14.49)

Losing your hearing can flip your world upside down and leave your mind in a turmoil. You may be full of fears, wondering how you will be able to live the rest of your life as a hard of hearing person. You don't know where to turn. You lament, "What do I do now?" Set your mind at rest. This easy to read book, written by a fellow hard of hearing person, is packed with the information and resources you need to successfully deal with your hearing loss and other ear conditions (116 pages).

Grieving for Your Hearing Loss—The Rocky Road from Denial to Acceptance (\$12.95; eBook \$9.95)

When you lose your hearing you need to grieve. This is not optional—but critical to your continued mental and physical health. This book leads you through the process of dealing with the grief and pain you experience as a result of your hearing loss. It explains what you are going through each step of the way. It gives you hope when you are in the depths of despair and depression. It shows you how you can lead a happy vibrant life again in spite of your hearing loss. This book has helped many (56 pages).



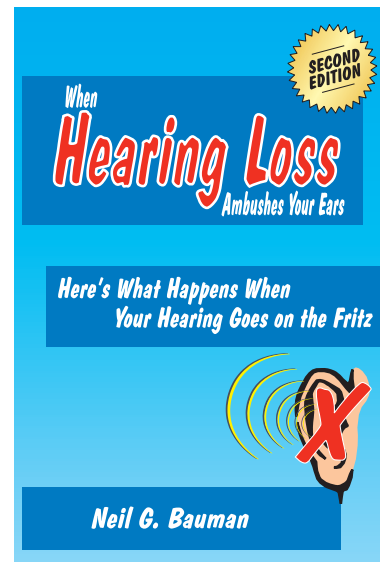


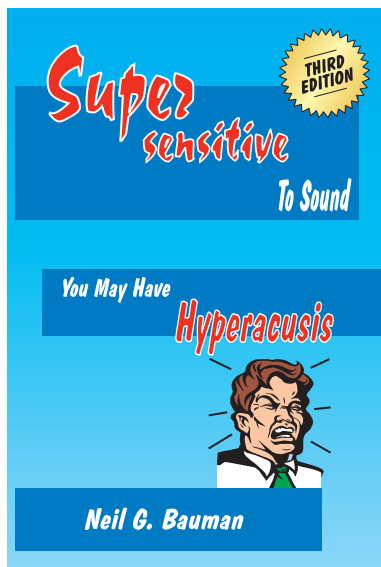
Talking with Hard of Hearing People—Here's How to Do It Right! (\$9.95; eBook \$7.95)

Talking is important to all of us. When communication breaks down, we all suffer. For hard of hearing people this happens all the time. This book is for you—whether you are hearing or hard of hearing! It explains how to communicate with hard of hearing people in one-to-one situations, in groups and meetings, in emergency situations, and in hospitals and nursing homes. When you use the principles given in this book, good things will happen and you will finally be able to have a comfortable chat with a hard of hearing person (38 pages).

When Hearing Loss Ambushes Your Ears—Here's What Happens When Your Hearing Goes on the Fritz (\$14.95; eBook \$11.95)

Hearing loss often blind-sides you. As a result, your first step should be to learn as much as you can about your hearing loss; then you will be able to cope better. This most interesting book explains how your ears work, the causes of hearing loss, what you can expect to hear with different levels of hearing loss and why you often can't understand what you hear. Lots of audiograms and charts help make things clear. You will also discover a lot of fascinating things about how loud noises damage your ears (88 pages).



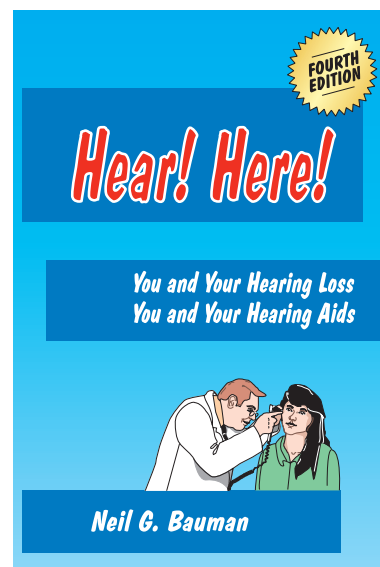


Supersensitive to Sound? You May Have Hyperacusis (\$9.95; eBook \$7.95)

If some (or all) normal sounds seem so loud they blow your socks off, this is the book you want to read! You don't have to avoid noise or lock yourself away in a soundproof room. Exciting new research on this previously baffling problem reveals what you can do to help bring your hyperacusis under control (42 pages).

Here! Here! You and Your Hearing Loss/You and Your Hearing Aids (\$12.95; eBook \$10.95)

Part I of this book contains a series of my newspaper articles on hearing loss such as, "Hear Today. Gone Tomorrow?" "Hearing Loss Is Sneaky!" "The Wages of Din Is Deaf!" "When Your Ears Ring..." "Get In My Face Before You Speak!" "How's That Again?" "Being Hard of Hearing Is Hard" "I'm Deaf, Not Daft!" Part II contains articles on hearing aids such as, "You Better Watch Out..." "Before Buying Your First Hearing Aid..." "Please Don't Lock Me Away in Your Drawer" "Good-bye World of Silence!" "Becoming Friends with Your Hearing Aids" "Two's Better Than One!" (56 pages).



You can order any of the foregoing books/eBooks (plus you can read more than 800 other helpful articles about hearing loss and related issues) from the

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