



Extended Wear Hearing Aids: Are They A Good Option?

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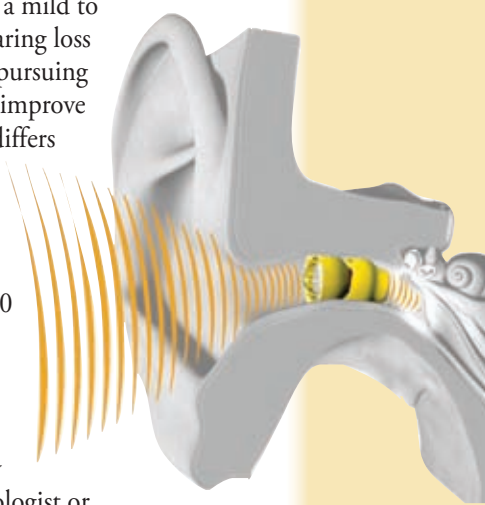
Our society has started to have more conversations about health and healthcare options. It is evident in the media, with more shows on TV and cable relating to the healthcare field, and websites that help us understand different diseases and treatments.

While Dr. Oz and webMD are great tools for public awareness and education, nothing replaces a face to face conversation with your healthcare provider. One question I receive regularly is “what is new and can it help me to hear more than I do now?” One product that has come on the market in the past few years is Lyric, an extended wear hearing aid.

Patients who have a mild to moderately severe hearing loss may be interested in pursuing Lyric as an option to improve their hearing. Lyric differs from other hearing aids, because it is worn deep in the ear canal close to the eardrum for up to 120 days at a time. It is a small, soft hearing aid that is fit in the office deeply into the ear canal. It can only be placed by an audiologist or otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat physician), but it can be removed by the patient at home. Patients are given a small tool that is used to increase or decrease the volume or mute the microphones.

For those patients who have difficulty with their fingers or hands, the Lyric hearing aid may be a good option. It is inserted in the office by the audiologist, and does not require a battery change or recharging. When the hearing aid needs to be replaced, the patient comes to the office to have the old hearing aid removed and a new one inserted. It takes about 10 minutes and is painless.

Patients who have concerns about missing important sounds when they are not wearing their hearing aid experience peace of



mind when wearing the Lyric. While patients can remove the Lyric at home using a small loop tool, it does not need to come out every night. Having amplified hearing 24 hours a day allows hearing-impaired patients to feel more connected to their environment. The Lyric can even be worn while in the shower, but should not be used while swimming or diving.

We all make choices about how we present our physical selves to the world. From our hair styles and clothing choices, we like to feel good about our outward appearance. The Lyric presents a choice for those patients who would like to have one of the most discreet hearing aids on the market.

With all those positive reasons to improve hearing in an easy-to-wear, cosmetically appealing device, you would wonder why everyone does not choose an extended wear hearing aid. There are several reasons that a patient may not be the best candidate for Lyric. First is the size of the ear canal. Since Lyric is not a

Do You Have Difficulty Hearing?

- Do you hear, but not understand, what is being said?
- Does it sound like people are mumbling?
- Do you have trouble hearing the television or radio, or do family members complain that the TV or radio is too loud?
- Do you often ask people to repeat what they've said?
- Do you have difficulty understanding what is being said on television?
- Do you find it difficult to hear people speak or follow conversation in a noisy environment, such as a restaurant or party?
- Do you have difficulty understanding women or children?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, you should have a full hearing evaluation.

custom product, if the ear canal is not large enough for the components, there is little that can be done. The company is working on making a new model that will fit a wider variety of patients. Also, if the patient has had many ear surgeries and no longer has a standard ear canal, the Lyric may not fit tightly into the surgically altered space.

Patients who have a history of chronic ear infections or Eustachian tube dysfunction may not be good candidates for an extended wear hearing aid. Ear drops and ear rinses cannot be used when the Lyric is in place, as it blocks the ear canal. A consultation with an otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat physician), can help in evaluating if an extended wear hearing aid would be appropriate.

Lastly, the design of the Lyric prevents measurement of the hearing aid in the ear with a probe microphone measurement. This type of measurement is referred to as “Real Ear Measurement.” In other words, comparing the sound coming out of the hearing aid at the level of the ear drum to the expected or “prescribed” level that the manufacturer states is being produced. This type of measure allows the audiologist to fine tune the hearing aid fitting with the particular acoustics of each individual’s ear to match prescribed amounts of gain for each frequency. Subjective reporting and measurements in the sound booth can help validate settings, but a real ear measurement is the best mea-

sure for verifying settings.

With all this in mind, the best way to find out if an extended wear hearing aid is appropriate for you or a family member is to be seen by a specialist. Seeking out a well-trained audiologist and scheduling a consultation are the first steps to better hearing. The Lyric is a product that appeals to a wide variety of patients and can be a wonderful solution for many patients.

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The Jefferson Balance and Hearing Center works with patients who have problems with their auditory and vestibular systems. The highly trained physicians and audiologists at Jefferson's Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, 925 Chestnut Street, 6th floor, Philadelphia, PA and Jefferson at the Navy Yard, 3 Crescent Drive, Suite 100, Philadelphia, PA provide state of the art diagnostic care and follow best medical evidence practices in providing treatment.

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