

Stupid Things To Do With Your Hearing Aids

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Really, how many old hearing aid molds does one need to keep?

The Hearing Husband and I recently sold the house we'd lived in for 16 years, and it was time to clean out The Stuff. It was an excruciatingly slow process, that drawer-to-drawer, closet-to-closet search of accumulated, but no longer needed things, deciding what to keep and what to throw out. Towards the end of the cull, you're cranky and start pitching out *anything* you can't brush your teeth with or wear to this year's Christmas party.

Then, pay dirt! Literally. I discovered my cache of old hearing aid pieces that I didn't realize I was hoarding – the brownest, most disgusting things I'd come across so far. The archeological find revealed five earmolds, circa pre-1994 when I switched to CICs, two sets of the green molds, and three sets of CICs as well as a selection of cleaning utensils that, of course, I could *never* find when I needed them! Missing from the cache were the actual behind-the-ear (BTE) technical pieces, which I must have donated to charitable organizations for repurposing. Accounted for was the hearing aid the dog ate; the screws, springs and plastic bits surviving that midnight munch weren't worth keeping.

Sitting on my bedroom floor with decades of brittle hearing technology gave me a pang of nostalgia, especially the detachable BTE ear molds. I had loved wearing them; they always fit like a second skin, and through the years, I'd spent many happy minutes blowing moisture bubbles out of the plastic tubing. Besides the good times, I remembered the silly dangers I'd exposed my hearing aids to. Miraculously, most had survived, passing away of old age around age 5 (by my calculation, 1 hearing aid year = 16 human years), but here are a few of the stupid things that *anybody* could do to shorten the lifespan of their hearing aids.

1. Wear them into the shower.

At almost the exact same moment that you think, “*My, that sounds like a pretty waterfall,*” reality hits and you jump out of the shower, taking the shower curtain with you. This happens *fast*, a split nano-second of time, because the potential drowning of \$4000 worth of hearing aids is the only thing that could make you move that quickly – especially naked.

2. Take your hearing aids out *before* you get into the shower.

Such a smart girl – you didn't leave them on the bedside table like you did for that big doggie to eat. You put them in your *dry aid*, which is on the bed with your clean clothes, awaiting your return. One small detail—you forgot to put the dry aid lid back on. And your *cats* are bored...and looking for something to play with.....

3. Try to clean them yourself.

Trying to perform a delicate operation for which you have no training is guaranteed to end badly. You just *couldn't* wait for the audiologist's office to open the next day and it *seemed* a simple

enough task to use a needle to try pulling out the tubing that had receded, sucked by a buildup of wax, into the interior of the aid, eliminating *something* that was important to the aid letting you hear.

4. Take them out to scratch your ear.

In a dark movie theater. With popcorn-buttery hands. Seriously.

5. Go scuba diving.

This didn't happen to me, but to my good friend Brian on a recent trip to Peru.

Brian: "*You're not going to tell this story in one of your articles, are you?*"

Me: "*Of course not.*"

Brian is new to hearing loss and he has been fitted with open fit hearing aids that are lighter than air and almost invisible to the eye. Even Brian's. He went scuba diving with his wife and had a marvelous time looking at the fishies. But when he got back to his hotel room he realized that his hearing aids had also swum with the fish – and one had floated away, presumably swallowed by something with fins.

But, praise be to Neptune! The other one was still in his ear, most likely held there by his tight scuba mask. Brian is a scientist and he jerry-rigged a dry aid using a jar and some rice. And, after a few hours, the hearing aid worked! He was able to enjoy the rest of his vacation, although with lopsided hearing.

Back in Toronto, he went to his audiologist, to discuss the lost hearing aid, and the one he'd salvaged which was now not working too well. Ya think? After being immersed in salt water for an hour? I'm not sure he confessed the full story to the audie, but turns out all it needed was a wax guard replacement. I should be so lucky; if that had happened to *me*, the hearing aid would have died, and the replacement cost would be \$2000, not a wax guard.

Being the envious type, I take some consolation in the fact that Brian and I have the same hearing care professional – and I hope she's reading this.

Tell your clients to take care of their hearing aids. They might not believe it at first, but they would miss them if they were gone. If they don't believe you, tell them to call me.