

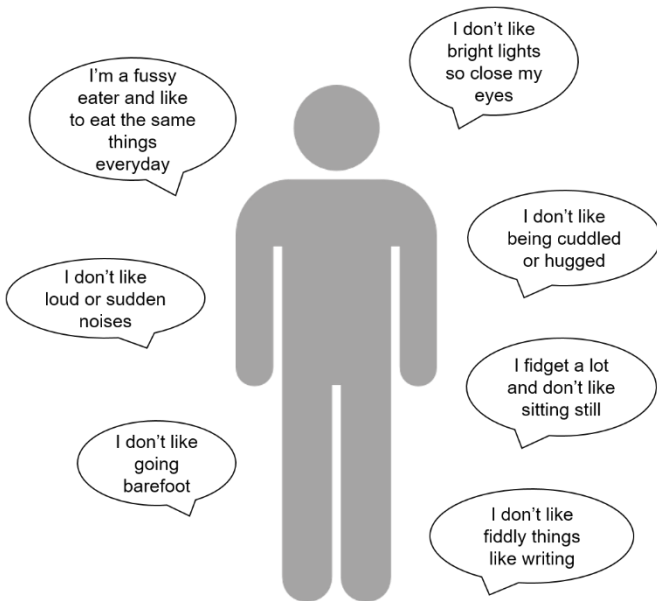
Helping your child get used to their hearing aid or cochlear implant: information for families

It can be challenging for some parents and carers of deaf and hearing-impaired children and young people, especially those with additional and complex needs, to get them to accept their hearing devices. This includes behind-the-ear hearing aids, bone anchored hearing aids and cochlear implants.

This is often due to sensory sensitivity – that is not liking the feeling of having anything on their head such as a hat or hair clip, or wanting anything touching their head and hair, for instance, brushing or washing. This sensitivity can affect how they cope with hearing devices so they become anxious and even ‘fearful’ of them.

This information sheet from the Audiology team at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) explains how you can help your child to manage sensory sensitivity so wearing hearing devices becomes easier with time.

Sensory sensitivity can take many forms, such as:

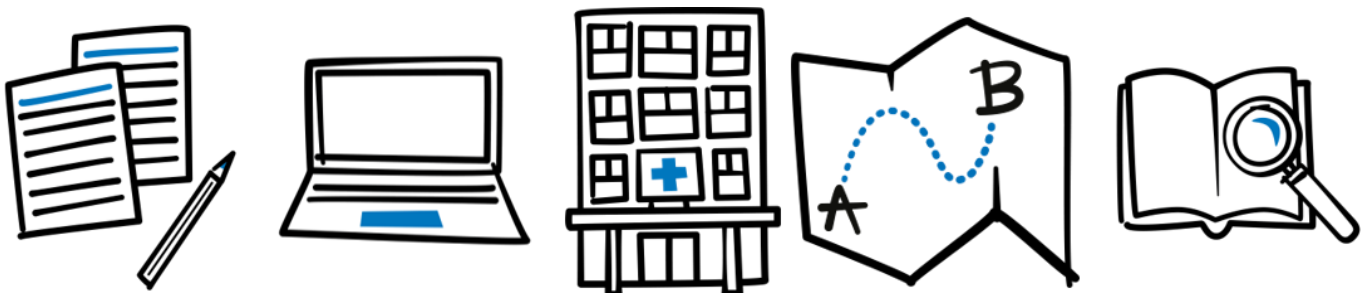


You may recognise a few of these in your child.

One of the methods that can help to improve sensory sensitivity is based on ‘de-sensitisation’. This means that we can help your child to feel more comfortable being touched on the head and ears and so they become more accepting of having items put there, such as their hearing device.

De-sensitisation is not a quick fix. It can take a long time and often small steps forward are seen over months, not days or weeks. Do not worry, feel confident that those small steps are significant. It is important that you do not give up.

Keep trying some of the activities below at least once a day.



Normalising the hearing device

An important part of de-sensitisation is to make the hearing device a normal part of everyday life, in the same way as a pair of shoes. Your child may become more anxious about the hearing device if you bring it out, try it, then lock it away again out of sight when it is rejected.

Try to keep the hearing device nearby during the day so it becomes part of your child's everyday background. You could also try customising the hearing device with stickers – ask for ideas at your next Audiology appointment.

Let your child play with the device if this feels safe. Put it on their toys or 'take it for a ride' on a toy car or train.

If your child is happy to be touched with the device switched off, try letting them hold it switched on. Just hold it or touch it on their skin. Do not worry about them putting it in their ears or on their head, until you feel that they are ready to do so.

Wearing the device switched off

Try to persuade your child to wear their hearing device but switched off if they will tolerate this. If your child has a soft headband for the device, try them wearing it but without the device in place. When they start to accept the feeling of the headband in place, you can start to introduce the hearing device too.

De-sensitisation methods

If your child dislikes any touch or feeling on their head, hair or ear, you could try some of the following activities to see which help. Remember, some activities might work better for your child than others so try a selection.

Using a toy – such as a car or teddy – ask your child to rest it gently on their skin on different parts of the body, working upwards towards their head.



Make this fun and join in so your child can put the toy on your body too. You can gradually increase the touch so the car rolls along their skin or the teddy jumps from one part to another.

Using a soft sponge or squishy ball, bounce it against their skin in various areas, again working upwards towards their head. As they get used to the sensation, they could try 'heading' the ball or pushing it along the floor using their nose. If they tolerate this, try massaging their head gently with the ball.

Getting used to brushes – have a selection of brushes at home, both hair brushes, tooth brushes as well as clothes and shoe brushes. Use these when you are singing 'this is the way we ...', showing your child what to do. Let your child brush your hair or their doll's hair before working up to brushing their own.

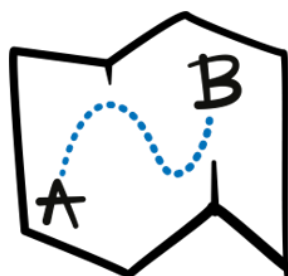
Incey wincey spider – sing this song as you use a toy spider or your fingers to move up your child's body towards their head. Take turns to do it to each other but remember it's important for your child to touch their own body too.



Use a head massager – there are lots of different versions available but your fingers do just as well. Gently massage your child's scalp and gradually build up how long you take.

Pretend to be a turtle – or another animal that pulls in its head, such as a tortoise – to role play pulling their head under their hands and then slowly peeping out.

Play games with hats – have a selection at home or make your own then wear them as part of a game or sing and dance. As well as you and your child, their toys could also wear hats as well as other members of the family, such as a pet.



You could also do a play activity to make or decorate your own hats to wear.

Introducing the hearing device

Once your child is more used to having their skin, head and hair touched, you can start to bring in the hearing device so they get used to it.

Take the hearing device for a walk – with the device switched off or on, move it up your child's arm and towards their head, so they can feel the vibrations, hear the sounds and get used to the lights.

Massage or rub the area where your child's hearing device will be placed, starting off very gently and gradually increasing the length of time and the pressure you use. Try doing it while your child is distracted, watching TV or playing a game.

Further information and support

The National Deaf Children's Society has lots of helpful suggestions for helping your child get used to their hearing device, as well as ideas for personalising them for your child. Visit their website at <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/childhood-deafness/hearing-aids/getting-your-child-to-wear-their-hearing-aids-and-cochlear-implants/> for further ideas. Their helpline is available at 0808 800 8880 or you could send a text message to 0786 00 22 888.

As your child gets less anxious

Start to persuade your child to wear their hearing device – switched off initially.

Try to get them to wear it while they are distracted doing something else.

Once they can wear it for a short while, switch it on to see whether they can tolerate it.

Remember, even if they wear it for a few seconds at a time, this is an improvement and a step in the right direction. Continue with the de-sensitisation activities and the length of time they can wear the hearing device will increase.



Try to do some de-sensitisation every day, as part of your normal routine.

