FAQs on Hearing Aids and Stethoscope Use

Are Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids compatible with the 3M™ Littmann® Electronic Stethoscope Model 3200?
Currently, the Littmann® Electronic Stethoscope Model 3200 is NOT compatible with any Bluetooth hearing aids or streamers. The Littmann® Electronic Stethoscope Model 3200 was intentionally designed not to be compatible with Bluetooth hearing aids because hearing aids cannot reproduce the low frequency sounds of auscultation, and as a consequence, pertinent sounds could be missed during auscultation.

Why is the Littmann Stethoscope Model 3200 not compatible with Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids?
Hearing aids [for the most part] have been designed to accommodate human voices which typically reside in the 300-3,000Hz frequency range. High-end, sophisticated hearing aids can be digitally programmed to produce sounds specific to the individual’s hearing requirements, but the capability of the speaker within the hearing aid is limited.

The frequencies of greatest interest during auscultation are 20-1,000Hz, and heart sounds typically fall in the frequency range 20-200Hz. Therefore, hearing aids do not typically accommodate the sounds of auscultation, and even the best hearing aids on the market only provide acoustical frequency response down to 125Hz. Therefore, there is a mismatch between the capability of the hearing aid and the sounds that are most important to heart auscultation. The hearing aid would essentially filter out or eliminate sounds the clinician is trying to hear.

I have hearing aids; can I use my current stethoscope?
Currently, the options are limited for hearing impaired clinicians. However, there are different arrangements of stethoscopes and hearing aids that can accommodate hearing impaired clinicians depending on their particular situation.
NOTE: For best auscultation sound quality, we do not recommend listening and/or passing the stethoscope sounds through the hearing aid.

Option 1: Remove the hearing aid(s) during auscultation

Option 2: It is possible to use a hearing aid and the stethoscope concurrently. Some hearing aid manufacturers sell custom made adaptors that are intended to serve as an intermediary between the behind the ear (BTE) hearing aid and the stethoscope. However, custom made adaptors have had limited acceptance because the adaptor can be uncomfortable to the user and/or it is difficult for the stethoscope to maintain and good connection to the adaptor during use.

Option 3: Some BTE hearing aids have a very thin diameter wire that rests in the ear canal. In some situations, you can still use a soft eartip and get a good fit without removing the hearing aid. However, if trying to use the stethoscope while the hearing aid is in your ear canal, it is important that you are able to maintain a good seal in your ear with the stethoscope eartip.

What else can I do?
Contact your hearing aid manufacturer and request that they develop a hearing aid to specifically meet the needs of a clinician (i.e. a hearing aid that reproduces and emphasizes low frequencies).

For more information specific to your situation, please contact our 3M Health Care Helpline at 1-800-228-3957 or by filling out the Contact Us form on Littmann.com.