

HOW OFTEN SHOULD A CHILD WEAR HEARING TECHNOLOGY?

Dr. Caraway: How much does my child actually need to wear their hearing devices? Those curious hands love to explore everything, and they may be in a phase of taking their hearing aids or cochlear implants off what feels like a thousand times a day. In this video, we'll answer how many hours your child needs their hearing devices to be on and working properly, and explain the research behind it.

Hi, I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First, we are here to help and support families just like yours who have a child with hearing loss. We want to empower you as your child learns to listen, talk, read, and thrive just like kids with typical hearing.

The most important thing to remember is that your child's hearing devices are brain access devices. They give your child's brain access to all the sounds of speech it needs to develop listening, talking, and reading skills. On those challenging days when you're tempted to just leave devices off, I'd encourage you to persevere because it's all about brain development.

In this video, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Jace Wolfe. He's a pediatric audiologist with over 25 years of experience working with babies and young children who are deaf or hard of hearing. He's going to explain why it's so important to keep hearing aids and cochlear implants on for at least 10 hours a day.

Dr. Wolfe: Hi, I'm Dr. Jace Wolfe. Over the years in my career as a pediatric audiologist, I have had many parents ask me, what's the most important thing I can do to help my child with hearing loss? They're often surprised by my answer. I always tell them, make sure your child is wearing their hearing aids or cochlear implant during all waking hours. Just think of it as when their eyes are open, their devices are on too. As we like to say, eyes open, ears on, so just how many hours are you aiming for? At least 10 hours per day according to the research. Let's talk about that research.

Many studies have looked at the importance of full-time use of hearing aids and cochlear implants. Researchers studied the wear time of infants and toddlers with cochlear implants. They found that every child who wore their cochlear implant all day every day by age two had typical listening and talking skills by age three and unfortunately, the children who weren't wearing their cochlear implants full-time, experienced delays in their listening and talking at age three. In fact, they learned that developing age appropriate listening and

talking skills depended more on the wear time than on the child's age at which they receive their implants.

In other words, while we know it's really important for babies who are born deaf to receive their cochlear implants as early as possible, that is not enough. For children with hearing loss to reach their full potential and develop listening, talking, and reading skills, they must use their hearing technology during all waking hours.

This research is great because it proves that your efforts as a parent in keeping hearing aids, or cochlear implants on your baby's ears are more than worth it. Every time you make sure their devices are on, no matter how many times your curious toddler tries to take them off, you are helping your child reach their full potential.

Let's talk about why wear time makes such a big difference. The answer to that question also has to do with why it's so important your child receives their technology as early as possible. It's all about the brain.

A baby is born with around a hundred billion brain cells.

That is the same number of brain cells in the adult brain. These brain cells must form connections with one another to create the neural networks or pathways that are necessary for a child to learn to listen, to talk and read. The more words a baby hears, the stronger the connections become. When these brain cells are not stimulated by sound, and spoken language during the first few months and years of a child's life, those neural connections are eliminated, and that means the child's listening skills will suffer, which leads to delays in other areas of development like talking and reading.

Congenital hearing loss or hearing loss that is present at birth is truly a neurodevelopmental emergency. The best way to respond to that emergency is by full-time use of hearing aids or cochlear implants.

The more a baby wears their hearing aids or cochlear implants, the more words they will hear. The more words they hear, the more brain connections develop to optimize listening, talking and reading skills. Every moment that hearing aids or cochlear implants are not worn is a lost opportunity to develop the brain's neural networks that will help your child reach their full potential.

Some parents ask about taking listening breaks, where their child will go without their hearing devices for short breaks during the day. If your child seems overwhelmed in certain listening situations, or you think they have what some parents call listening fatigue, the answer is not to take the devices off. Instead of removing their hearing technology, I recommend taking a short break from the situation and finding a quieter space. Spend some calm time while continuing to wear the hearing devices.

I have heard people talk about a wear schedule to slowly add more time each day, but that is not recommended. It's best to dive right into full-time use. The research shows that every

minute with hearing technology is an opportunity to develop auditory neural pathways. I know this might sound challenging with a baby, but I have met hundreds of parents who have championed their child's wear time during all waking hours, and the outcomes are exceptional. I promise your perseverance will be worth it.

Dr. Caraway: The research is clear, wear time matters. Set your goal to have hearing devices on all waking hours starting on day one. If your child is struggling to keep their devices on, there are special accessories that may help.

Check out our video or the infographic link below. Remember, each child's hearing loss is unique, and you know your child best. If you have concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to your professional team. They are ready and willing to help you with your little one.

Wherever you are on this journey, and however you may be feeling, you are not alone, Hearing First is here to help you every step of the way. If you'd like to connect with other families with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, click the link below to join the Facebook group, and be sure to subscribe to the YouTube channel for new videos with tips and advice. For more resources and support, visit hearingfirst.org.