

Electronic Ears...

Flying High!

I love my skydiving career!

True Health Drama

I've gone digital!

Careful!' my mum, Katy, bellowed, as I stepped off the curb into a busy main road.

As cars swerved to avoid me, she pulled me back on to the pavement. 'Didn't you hear the traffic?' she shouted.

But the truth was, I didn't. I was only a kid, had been in and out of doctors' surgeries with hearing problems for ages.

And it was always the same: 'She's got selective hearing,' they said. Docs reckoned I only heard what I wanted to.

At school, I assumed no-one heard the lessons properly. It was only when I started college I realised how much I missed.

A few weeks into my first term, Mum took me to a new GP. And, as soon as I started talking...

'Your hearing's off,' he said. 'I can tell - you're lip reading.'

He referred me to a specialist hearing hospital in Leeds, who confirmed I only heard 50 per cent of sounds in both ears.

I was given hearing aids that helped me pick up sounds in



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some situations, if there was no background noise. But, in crowds, my head filled with loud buzzing. And the aids were so bulky.

But I passed my 'A' levels, and went to Lancaster Uni to study Biomedical Science.

I loved the busy student life and, when I spotted a poster for a skydiving club, I signed up.

The following week, I found myself in a plane over Lancashire, for my first jump.

I psyched myself up, got ready to leap, but then... 'Aaaagh!' My hearing aids started buzzing. Then one switched off. And the other fell out of my

ear. Flustered, I managed to jump, hearing aids intact. But the frustration continued.

Three years and nearly 500 jumps later, uni was finished. It was time to find a job.

And I decided I wanted to be a skydiving instructor! But my hearing aids were a real problem - so bulky, I could hardly fit my helmet on.

I did an Internet search and *Digital Hearing Care* flashed up. I called its audiologist, Paul Minikin, who came to show me a new gadget, the Phonak Ambra - like tiny, specially moulded earplugs.

At £4,000, not cheap - but Mum and my grandma Helen found the money. A week later, the aids were ready - and fitted perfectly. No falling out, no switching off.

A year on, I've qualified as a skydiving coach.

And it's all thanks to my tiny, new, electronic ears. ●

HEARING AIDS

There are an estimated four million people with hearing loss in the UK who could benefit from wearing a hearing aid.

An aid can enhance your existing hearing to make sounds louder and clearer (although rarely restore hearing to normal).

There are different types of aid, with different advantages, depending on size, levels of amplification and design. They're all battery operated and the main types are 'in the ear' (which sit in the outer ear), 'behind the ear' and 'in the canal' (which sit in the ear canal).

You can get hearing aids free on the NHS or you can buy them privately.

'The aids fitted perfectly!'