
HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT HEARING AID FOR YOU

Just like glasses are for patients with vision loss, a hearing aid helps patients with hearing loss. Hearing loss is a serious condition caused by many different factors. An ENT (ear, nose, and throat) specialist, or otolaryngologist, is the best specialist to diagnose a hearing loss. Depending on your degree of hearing loss, type of hearing loss, and other medical factors, you may benefit from a hearing aid. A primary care physician can refer you to an ENT specialist, who often works in conjunction with an audiologist, to evaluate the severity and cause of your hearing loss.

An audiogram, often given by an audiologist, assesses the hearing loss. The audiogram is a hearing evaluation of your ability to hear pure tone sounds and understand words. The results of these tests will reveal the degree of hearing loss, and additional information about your ears and overall health. A soundproof booth minimizes outer noise. After the test, an ENT specialist can diagnose your hearing loss and counsel you on how best to manage it.

HOW DO I SELECT A HEARING AID?

Your care team can recommend hearing aid manufacturers that best meet your hearing requirements. Hearing aids vary according to style, features, and price so selecting the right one is essential. Prices can range from under \$1,000 to more than \$4,000 for *each* device depending on the level of technology (most insurance providers do not cover the cost). Product quality and proper care can save you repair costs and enhance your satisfaction.

Important Tip: Federal law on obtaining hearing aids is changing. Adults will not have to see a doctor to buy hearing aids, but we recommend that it's still the safest, smartest step to talk to an ENT specialist. Hearing loss and balance disorders are medical conditions.

Only licensed physicians with a medical school degree (MD or DO) and training may diagnose and direct the management of diseases and medical disorders that cause hearing loss.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HEARING AIDS?

The best hearing aid for you depends on your individual hearing loss and listening needs, the size and shape of your ear and ear canal, and how well you can use your hands. Some hearing aids work better with phones and other sound systems, and some include Bluetooth options. Styles include:

- Behind-the-ear (BTE) aids go over the ear and are thinly wired to personally fitted earpieces
- Receiver-in-the-ear (RITE) aids are placed over the ear but are small and nearly invisible
- In-the-ear (ITE) hearing aids fit in the ear bowl area and part of the ear canal
- You may also be able to use smaller in-the-ear, or in-the-canal (ITC) aids
- The least visible aids are completely-in-the-canal (CIC)

In addition, **Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs)**, which are available over the counter, cost a fraction of the price of the average hearing aid. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration currently states that "PSAPs are not intended to be used as hearing aids to compensate for hearing impairment," but they may be helpful to some people with mild to moderate hearing loss.

Usually, if you have hearing loss in both ears, using two hearing aids is best. Listening in a noisy environment is difficult with an aid in just one ear because it is harder to distinguish where sounds are coming from. Again, your otolaryngologist and/or audiologist can help you decide which device may work best for you and your lifestyle.

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WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK MY DOCTOR?

With any healthcare provider, you always have the right to ask questions like:

1. Do I really need a hearing aid?
2. Will using a hearing aid cause further hearing loss?
3. Are there simpler, cheaper options?
4. What happens if I don't do anything?

When talking to your hearing aid retailer, be sure to ask about:

- Proper usage and care strategies
- Future service and repair plans
- Trial period or return policy
- Warranty coverage and extra insurance
- Consumer protection programs

Most importantly, a hearing aid should fit comfortably, or you're likely not to use it. The person fitting your hearing aid should test your understanding of words

and sounds in quiet as well as in noisy environments. On your own, you may start using your hearing aids in quiet surroundings to get used to the changes before moving on to more noisy places like the grocery store or a restaurant.

Think about keeping a diary to help you remember your experiences in different environments and report them to your fitter for adjustments as needed until you're comfortable wearing your hearing aids during all waking hours.

Be patient and allow yourself to get used to the aids and the "new" sounds they allow you to hear.