

Top 10 tips from a pro on how to purchase hearing aids.

When you are looking to buy hearing aids it is easy to feel swamped by the sheer amount of information. There are so many different types of hearing aids available, unless you know exactly what your needs are it can seem like an impossible task. Here is a guide to help you buy hearing aids successfully.

1 See an Audiologist.

The most qualified and educated person to diagnose your hearing loss and fit your hearing aids is an Audiologist. If you don't see the word "Audiologist" or the initials Au.D. after the person's name, go someplace else. Don't believe me? See the hearing aid buying guide published by Consumer Reports. They got it right.

<https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/hearing-aids/buying-guide/index>

Until you know the degree of your hearing loss and what is causing it, you won't be able to do anything about it. Visit an audiologist who will carry out a complete hearing test in a sound treated room. The Audiologist will then explain to you how severe your hearing loss is, what is causing it, and how to treat it. The Audiologist can refer you to a medical doctor if your hearing loss can be medically reversed. The Audiologist will also be able to tell you which kinds of hearing aids will work best for your particular hearing loss. Your hearing aids can be programmed to work with your level of hearing loss, so they will pick up the frequencies that you are not hearing well and amplify them without increasing the volume of other sounds.

2 Call your insurance company to check your benefits.

Most people do not have insurance coverage for hearing aids. Many insurance companies just cover the cost of the exam. However, some insurance companies do provide money for hearing aids and/or a discount program that will direct you to an establishment that can get your hearing aids at a discount. Some of these establishments are good, and some are basically a marketing gimmick. Let your audiologist sort this out for you.

I strongly recommend you get the information from your health insurance company and then call your Audiologist directly. The Audiologist will be able to tell you the most effective way to use your hearing aid benefit/discount program for your maximum benefit. It's not uncommon to get a better deal by NOT using your insurance companies' particular program.

3 Find a local provider and do your research.

Find a local Audiologist that is established and has a good reputation. Ask friends and relatives who their audiologist is. Most people do this to find a good physician also.

Many flashy sales ads will tout how great the hearing aids will work for you but say little about the person or office actually fitting the hearing aids. Has this office changed names and staff often? Many national brand offices are frequently bought and sold leaving the patient to deal with follow up issues years down the road. This can be extremely frustrating after spending thousands of dollars on hearing aids to find out that your provider is gone, and the new company has little or no experience with the model of hearing aid you are wearing. Does the local Big Box store have staff that changes often? Do they have hearing aid dealers instead of Audiologists working at the store? Who is fitting your hearing aids today? Tomorrow? Etc.... You want to avoid this.

Once you know what is causing your hearing loss, look up the condition and do some research about it. Will it stay the same over time or is it progressive? Can anything else be done to improve your hearing? Find out about the different kinds of hearing aids available which are suitable for your type of hearing loss. Ask your Audiologist questions about why a particular hearing aid is being recommended for your hearing loss.

There are 6 major hearing aid manufacturers in the world. Ask why a particular manufacturer is being used for you. Avoid hearing aid sales people and franchises that sell only one brand of hearing aid.

4 Ignore magazine ads for hearing "devices" and flashy ads from hearing aid salespeople.

Do not purchase hearing aids or hearing devices from magazine ads or newspaper ads that make outrageous claims about how well these devices will work for you. Any hearing aid or device you purchase through the mail will most likely be a waste of your time and money.

See an Audiologist and get a professional opinion on your specific hearing loss so you can find out what the best treatment plan is.

Be aware that flashy newspaper ads that have people wearing white lab coats do not make them Audiologists. Too many advertisements feature people pretending to be Audiology or Medical professionals to misrepresent what they will be providing in their offices. Get a local Audiologist to fit your hearing aids. This is the person that will be performing services for you for years down the road. Keep that person.

5 Know what you want from your hearing aid.

There are many additional extras that you can buy for your hearing aid. These are all useful add-ons which can help someone with hearing loss to lead the life that they are used to. However you need to make sure that they fit in with your lifestyle. For example, many hearing aids now connect directly to cell phones. This is a wonderful option for many people to take advantage of. However, if you are not a big cell phone user, you can potentially save money by purchasing a model that does not have this feature that you may not need. Telecoils are also an option in which some hearing aids can connect wirelessly to hearing loops that have been installed in many churches, theaters, and arena's.

6 Shop around.

It is a good idea to shop around when looking to buy a hearing aid so that you can compare prices and services. Most providers now have a website where you can look up their services or search for company reviews. Find a company that you feel comfortable with and ask them lots of questions about the hearing aids they offer and what they think would be best for you. Please note that some of the street retailers are owned by hearing aid manufacturers. You may find that you are not offered the whole range of hearing aids that could effectively help you. The main manufacturers are Widex, Oticon, Starkey, Resound, Signia (Siemens), and Phonak. Most franchises get their hearing aids from one of these companies, re-label them, and charge outrageous fees to pay for their advertising budgets. Many times you can get the same or better hearing aid technology in a local Audiologist's office at a cheaper price.

7 Get a demonstration and/or Trial period

Many Audiologists offer a free demonstration so that you can try the hearing aid out before you buy it. The aid can be programmed to your hearing loss and worn with a disposable tip. It may feel strange at first and if you have had hearing loss for some time, the sound may take some getting used to. However, it is essential not to feel rushed. You should also consider how easy the hearing aid is to use.

8 Find out what's included in the cost including warranty and service.

At your appointment you should be offered a choice hearing aid type as well as some different brands. Ask questions about the features included with each one as well as optional extras. Only buy what you need and make sure that any extras are worth the money.

Hearing aids are an expensive investment and you should always check exactly what is included in the warranty and aftercare service. If there is any feedback such as a whistling noise or crackling, or the sound just isn't comfortable then go back for another appointment. Make sure that these follow up appointments are included in your aftercare package.

9 Hearing aids do not restore your hearing to normal.

If you ever see someone that tells you that a particular hearing aid is perfect or will restore your hearing to normal then turn and run.

Hearing aids cannot restore your hearing to normal nor are they perfect...they are used to AID you to better hearing.

Hearing aids are a great way to help you manage the negative effects of hearing loss but they are not a cure for hearing loss. As soon as you take the hearing aids off you will still have a hearing loss. However, waiting too long to start wearing hearing aids can have negative effects.

Several studies have shown that an untreated hearing loss (not wearing hearing aids when a hearing loss is detected) can result in increased anxiety, depression, memory loss, and may also be a risk factor for Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia.

No two people are going to have the same experience.

10 Take someone with you to your appointment.

Having any kind of test is stressful, so it is always a good idea to take someone with you to an appointment.



This guest blog was written by Seniorcare.ie and amended by Dr. Douglas Kloss, Audiologist at Midwest Audiology Center, LLC in Greenfield, WI.

Dr. Kloss has been an Audiologist in the Milwaukee Area for 28 years.
He can be reached at 4818 S. 76th St., Suite 3, Greenfield, WI 53220.
Telephone 414-281-8300 • Website: www.midwestaudiology.com
Email: midwestaudiology@att.net

Initial consults are free of charge.