



Hearing Aids: Important Tips for Buying and Making the Most of Them

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Everybody is Different

Every person's hearing loss and lifestyle is different. While there is no hearing aid that can be "one size fits all," the right hearing aid, coupled with good training in how to use it, can help you communicate better, enhance your safety, and help you feel more in touch with the world.

Be Realistic About Your Expectations

Remember that a hearing aid is just an aid. It will not "restore" hearing in the same way that glasses can correct vision. If you lost your hearing gradually, you may have forgotten what some sounds are like. It will take time for you to adjust to what you hear. Be patient as you practice listening with your new aid.

Be Assertive About Your Needs

You are in charge. You decide how and what you want to hear. If you are not satisfied with how a hearing aid works, return the aid within the trial period and try a different one. Persevere until you are satisfied – it's your money, your hearing and your life.

Considerations When Buying a Hearing Aid

1. Get the best possible professional advice. Try not to let advertising claims, the opinions of others and vanity influence your decisions.
2. In Virginia, you are legally entitled to a 30-day trial period for any hearing aid. Digital and digitally programmable hearing aids sometimes come with a 60-day trial period. Be sure to check with your hearing specialist.
3. For some behind-the-ear models, you will pay about \$50 for an ear mold made to fit snugly in your ear. There may be a special modification charge for in-the-ear or in-the-canal hearing aids.
4. Ask about getting a good quality telecoil. Often called a T-switch or telephone switch, the electro-magnetic coil makes it much easier to hear on the telephone and use assistive listening systems now installed in many theaters, movie houses, places of worship, libraries and public meeting rooms. You will also find that there are many helpful personal listening devices you can use to get the full benefit of your hearing aid.
5. Batteries will typically last from 5—14 days, depending on their size.

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Styles of Hearing Aids

Completely In the Canal (CIC)

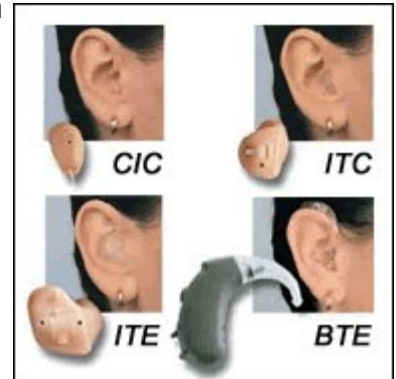
Smallest hearing aid available. Fits deep into the canal with a filament handle for easy removal. For mild to moderate losses. Couples well when using the phone. Delicate instrument with high maintenance. Can be difficult to handle due to small size and cannot accommodate a telecoil.

In The Canal (ITC)

Self-contained unit fills outer portion of ear canal and sits within the bowl area, filling only half the ear. For mild to moderate losses. Can be difficult to handle due to small size. Can have volume control but no telecoil.

In The Ear (ITE)

Self-contained unit which fills entire bowl area of the ear. For various degrees of hearing loss. Easy to insert and remove. Can have all circuits and options available; most adjustable and strongest of the styles that fit completely in the ear.



Behind The Ear (BTE)

Self-contained unit sits behind the ear with tube connecting into ear mold. For mild to profound loss. Very durable; often used with children. Some models have the receiver in the ear for profound losses.

Behind The Ear Open Fit

Similar to the basic BTE model but often much smaller. The tube is razor thin and connects to a small, soft silicone dome inside the ear which prevents the occlusion effect.

CROS and BiCROS

Transmits sound from a microphone near one ear to receiver on the other ear. Used when there is no good residual hearing in one ear.

Types of Hearing Aid Technology

Conventional Analog

Limited flexibility. Price typically \$800-\$1,100 per aid.

Digitally Programmable Analog

Advanced fitting flexibility. Price typically \$1,200 to \$2,200 per aid.

Fully Digital

Advanced fitting flexibility, often with a range of features. Price typically \$1,500—\$3,500 per aid.

What to Expect From Your Hearing Aid Specialist

Hearing Aid and Ear Mold

A hearing aid in good working order and, depending on the model, a comfortable ear mold, all properly adjusted to your specific requirements.

Sales Contract

A sales contract with details about the aid, including year of manufacture, serial number, the price including the ear mold, and details of non-refundable costs if you return the aid within the trial period. Note that if you purchase a hearing aid from a salesperson in your home or at a location that is not the seller's regular place of business, you have the right under the Federal Trade Commission's Door-to-Door sales rule to cancel your contract within three business days.

Information

Information on terms of payment, service warranty or insurance for the hearing aid, full name of specialist and state registration number, whether you will receive a loaner if your hearing aid needs to be repaired.

Do not sign anything until you are sure you understand all the details.

Paying for Your Hearing Aid

Medicaid, most HMOs, and private insurance will often pay only for the hearing tests, not the ear mold or hearing aid. Check with your insurance company about their requirements before you do anything. If coverage is provided, they will definitely insist that you see a doctor before you buy the aid.

If you choose not to have a medical examination, hearing aid specialists will ask you to sign a waiver stating this before you make a purchase. Signing this waiver can make it impossible to have insurance cover the cost.

What to Expect From Your Hearing Aid

A hearing aid will make sounds louder and in many instances it will make them clearer. It may have taken years to reach your current level of hearing loss, so don't expect things to sound the way they used to. However, you should not experience any actual pain or physical discomfort. Contact your specialist at once if it hurts to wear the aid.

Feedback (whistling) is often the result of improper fittings, loose ear molds, cracked tubing, or other problems that can be fixed. Do not accept feedback.

Getting Used to Your Hearing Aid

Introduce new sounds and more complex situations gradually to slowly practice recognizing sounds and judge the effectiveness of your hearing aid.

Start by getting used to the sound of the doorbell, telephone ring, refrigerator, water running, etc.

- Take your aid off if you get tired.
- If you have a volume control, set the volume at a point you can hear comfortably and leave it there.

Try talking with one person in a quiet room, then try picking out individual voices with a small group of friends.

Try to understand the radio and television set at normal sound levels.

Try more difficult situations such as large groups, public meetings, listening in the car or restaurant, or other places with background noise.

- This will be the hardest, since hearing aids will often amplify background noise as well as the voice you want to hear. Eventually you may learn to block out some unwanted sounds automatically.

List everything that bothers you the first week or so, no matter how unimportant it seems.

- Return to your specialist with the list. Very often there is a solution.
- Follow-up is your responsibility. Return with a list until you are satisfied.
- Your aid needs to be worn all the time to improve the quality of your life.

All hearing aids work well in a quiet room. In noisy situations, you may need assistive devices and telecoils to reduce or eliminate background noise.

- Ask your specialist about them, or contact NVRC.
- Also ask about the many coping strategies you can use.
- There may be times when nothing will help. In those instances, turn off your hearing aid and concentrate on enjoying the occasion, the food and being with your family and friends.