



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 normal hearing in the same way that glasses can restore 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. Keep doing this 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. Your goal is to improve your hearing.

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.

Don't give up too soon. Sometimes it takes weeks or even months to adjust to a new hearing aid and notice improvements.

3. For some behind-the-ear model, 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.

The three-stage Fifiield technique, though not as well-known in the U.S. as in Australia, creates ear molds known for their no-whistle fit.

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4. Choose a hearing aid with 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. For more information, see our fact sheet on Assistive Listening Devices.

A telecoil will not add significantly to the cost of your hearing aid if you ask for it when first ordering the aid.

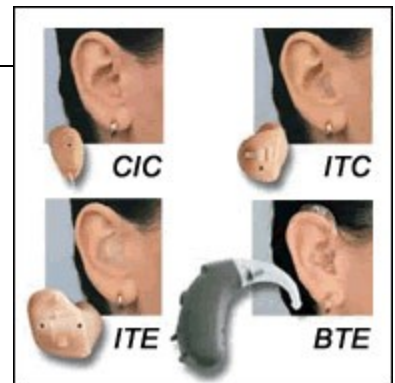
5. Remember that the smaller the battery, the shorter the life of the battery.

Batteries will typically last from 5 days to 14 days, depending on their size.

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.

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.

Rechargeable Hearing Aid

Designed for those with difficulty changing batteries due to arthritis, low vision or other challenges. An In The Ear model; recharges overnight, gets 16 hours of use per charge. Recharging system adds approximately \$400 to the price of the aids.

Disposables

The March 2001 Johns Hopkins Medical Letter says, "Disposable units that fit into the ear canal are an alternative for people who don't want to change batteries or make a major initial investment...these are appropriate only for those with a mild degree of hearing loss and a relatively large ear canal, since they come in only one size." Batteries last 30-40 days and the cost is under \$100.

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-\$2,200 per aid.

Fully Digital

Advanced fitting flexibility, often with a range of features. Price typically \$1,500 - \$3,200 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 as prescribed by your audiologist, 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.

See our fact sheet on “Financial Assistance for Buying Hearing Aids” for more information.

What to Expect From Your Hearing Aid

- A hearing aid will make some sounds louder. If you can no longer hear high frequency sounds, you will need an aid that amplifies those frequencies. Low frequency sounds can be partly blocked so that they are not uncomfortably loud. 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.
- For some people the digital hearing aids are wonderful. Others find the improvement is not worth the increase in cost. Each person is different. It's up to you to determine what works for you. Be sure your specialist is willing to work with you to find a hearing aid that gives you the most satisfactory results.
- Feedback (whistling) is often the result of improper fitting. Do not accept feedback. It is caused by loose ear molds, loose fitting, cracked tubing, or other things that can be fixed.

**Not happy with your hearing aid?
Take it back, get it fixed, or try another.
Don't give up until you and your specialist
have exhausted all the options.
YOUR HEARING IS IMPORTANT.**

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.
- Try it for longer periods until you can wear it all day.
- 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.
- You may learn in time to block out some unwanted sounds.

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

- Return to your specialist with the list. Most likely 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 food, playing the game, being with your family and making the best of the situation.