

What You Should Know Before Buying Hearing Aids on Your Own

Think you may have a hearing loss? Wondering what to do next?

A good place to start is the audiologist. Audiologists are hearing health care professionals who provide hearing care for people of all ages. Audiologists have graduate degrees and are licensed and certified. These highly trained and trusted professionals conduct tests to determine if you have a hearing loss. After the hearing test, the audiologist will explain the results to you and will work with you to make a plan to help your hearing and communication.

If hearing aids are recommended, audiologists adjust the hearing aids to meet your personal hearing needs. Audiologists also provide follow-up care and guidance to make sure that you get the most from these complex medical devices.

Today, you have more options for buying hearing aids—online and over the counter (OTC). These options are called “direct to the consumer”—meaning without the help of an audiologist. Buying hearing aids on your own can be easy and private—and may even be cheaper. However, before you buy hearing aids without the guidance of an audiologist, here are some things you should know:

- Hearing loss is a very complex medical condition.
- Hearing aids do not just make sounds louder. They are complicated medical devices that should be programmed and fitted specifically for you.
- Hearing aids have technology that can be adjusted by an audiologist to meet your own hearing needs.
- Hearing aids that you buy on your own without a complete hearing test may not give you the loudness or sound quality you want or need.
- It may not be helpful for you to have *all* sounds louder. For example, when you are in a restaurant or a crowded meeting, you do not want all of those sounds louder. Audiologists may adjust hearing aids to make sounds louder where you need it and to lower background noise. This should help you understand speech better in everyday environments. To help you adjust to hearing aids, audiologists

provide office visits, guidance, and support after you purchase hearing aids. Hearing aids that you purchased on your own will not include these services.

- It is important to understand the cause of your hearing loss. Online or mobile app–based hearing screening tests (not full hearing tests) cannot tell you why you have a hearing loss. It can be something as minor as too much earwax or as major as a brain tumor. Currently, online hearing screenings can only alert you that your hearing is not normal and that you need further testing—they cannot tell you the cause of your hearing loss.

Use caution when buying a hearing aid for a child.

- Talk to a physician and an audiologist before you buy a hearing aid for a child. Using the wrong kind of hearing aid or turning the hearing aid up too loud could result in permanent damage to the child’s hearing.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires a medical evaluation for all potential hearing aid users from birth to 17 years old.

Get the most out of your hearing aids.

You will work with your audiologist even after the hearing aids are fitted. This will make sure that the hearing aids are meeting your needs. You should be happy with the sound quality and improvements in communication. Here are some tips to help you get the most from your appointments.

- Learn how to take care of your new hearing aids. The audiologist will teach you how and will show you how to use them in a way that allows you to get the most out of them. You will go to follow-up appointments to check in. At these appointments, the audiologist will make changes to your hearing aids to help you hear better.
- Bring family members or significant others with you. It is important that they understand how to help you communicate best.

A bad experience with hearing aids can make you less likely to try again. Be sure to have good fitting hearing aids. It is important to have professional guidance and support to help you use these complex hearing devices.

Remember: Hearing aids will not make your hearing normal again. They help you hear much better than you would hear without them when they are adjusted correctly.

Face-to-face care from knowledgeable professionals is important for your hearing health and ensures effective communication with your new hearing aids.

Success with hearing aids is more than the actual device. To find a certified audiologist who can make a difference in your life, contact us at audiology@asha.org.

NOTES:

For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit www.asha.org/aud/pei/.

For more information about hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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