



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

AUDIOLOGY

Information Series

What You Should Know Before Buying Hearing Aids Online

Before you buy your hearing aids online, here are some things you should know.

The Internet offers many advantages for consumers looking for information and products. Online purchasing is convenient and private, and in some cases may offer cost savings for individuals. However, before you buy devices such as hearing aids online, here are some things you should know:

- A hearing aid is a complex medical device, not a simple sound amplifier.
- Hearing aids have digital technology that can be set by an audiologist to meet your personal hearing needs.
- Hearing aids bought online without a complete hearing test and other necessary hearing aid services may not meet your needs.
- Setting hearing aids for your needs requires specific computer software that audiologists may not have access to if the devices were bought online. For some online businesses, getting the hearing aid settings changed may only be possible by shipping the hearing aid back to the manufacturer, which means you will have to go without your hearing aid for a while.
- To help with your adjustment to hearing aids, audiologists generally provide office visits, reprogramming, counseling, and support when you buy a hearing aid from them. Hearing aids purchased online will generally not include these services.

If you suspect that you have a hearing loss, see your doctor. The medical exam will determine if your hearing loss is medically treatable. If it is not, you will be referred to a licensed audiologist to see if you are a candidate for hearing aids. With a medical referral, Medicare beneficiaries can get a complete hearing test at no cost.

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) strongly recommends that you see a doctor to rule out medical causes of hearing loss before buying hearing aids. For children 18 years old or younger, a medical evaluation is required.

- Online hearing screens cannot tell you the cause of hearing loss—the cause may be something as minor as too much earwax or as serious as brain tumor. Currently, online hearing screens can only alert you that your hearing is not normal and that you need further testing.

Success with hearing aids begins with a complete hearing test by an audiologist.

For accuracy, hearing tests are conducted in sound-treated rooms using special earphones and equipment that have been calibrated to national standards. Online hearing screens do not meet these standards and may lead to inaccurate test results.

The hearing test begins with a thorough discussion about your lifestyle, listening needs, medical history, and any other concerns you may have. This will help with the selection of the special features you might need in your hearing aids.

Your audiologist will perform several different tests to determine what benefits you can expect from hearing aids:

- The audiogram is a record of the type and degree of your hearing loss and how well you can hear soft tones at different pitches. It is more than a hearing screening.
- Speech testing is a measure of how well you can hear and understand speech in quiet and background noise.
- Loudness discomfort testing will measure your ability to tolerate loud sounds and will help the audiologist set the hearing aids so that loud sounds are not uncomfortable.

Following the testing, the audiologist will explain the results and work with you to develop a plan to improve your hearing and communication. This discussion is important for understanding your hearing loss and what you can expect from hearing aids if they are recommended for you.

With a better understanding of you and your hearing loss, your audiologist may recommend hearing assistive technology (e.g., telephone amplifiers, TV devices, FM systems, audio-loops) to help you hear better in situations where hearing aids may be of less help (e.g., in a car, when the TV is on, or in groups of people talking). Hearing assistive technology can be used alone or with hearing aids.

Get the most out of your hearing aids.

If hearing aids are recommended, you will continue to work with your audiologist to ensure that the hearing aid is meeting your needs and that you are happy with the sound quality and improvements in communication.

- Using very specialized technology called *Real Ear* equipment; the audiologist can precisely measure and filter the sound the hearing aids send into your ear canals. This technology will make sure that speech sounds are reaching your ear in a safe and comfortable way.
- When you purchase hearing aids through a hearing aid dispensing practice, you are assured that the audiologist is appropriately licensed and has the computer software to make changes to the function of your hearing aids. When hearing aids are purchased online, it may be difficult to get adjustments locally if the dispenser does not have access to the programming software.

- You will learn how to care for and use your hearing aids and be able to demonstrate this comfortably before you leave the office.
- You will learn about your hearing loss, what to expect with the new devices, and how to function best in different listening environments. Additional fitting follow up and counseling is valuable and can continue until you are satisfied.
- Be sure to bring family members or significant others along to your appointments. It is important that they understand how you communicate best. Some audiologists offer special classes designed to help you live successfully with hearing loss.
- Properly fitted devices, counseling, and support go a long way toward improving your listening and satisfaction with these complex digital devices. A bad experience with hearing aids can make you less likely to try again.

Face-to-face care from knowledgeable professionals is the key to improving your hearing and communication with your new hearing aids.

Success with hearing aids involves more than the device. To find a certified audiologist who can make a difference in your life, use the ProSearch directory.

NOTES:



For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, scan with your mobile device.

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



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