



ASHA
Audiology
Dedicated to Advancing
the Profession of Audiology

I Think I May Need Hearing Aids... Now What?

Do you think you have hearing loss? Wondering what to do next?

A good first step would be to make an appointment with a licensed and certified audiologist. An **audiologist** is a trained health care professional who has a master's or a doctorate degree.

The audiologist will take a case history and perform tests to check your outer, middle, and inner ear. After that, the audiologist will explain the results to you. Then, they will work with you to help manage any hearing and communication difficulties.

If I have a hearing loss, how do I go about getting hearing aids?

There are two classifications of hearing aids: **prescription hearing aids** and **over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids**.

Prescription hearing aids are selected, fitted, and verified by an audiologist. Typically, when you purchase prescription hearing aids, the audiologist offers other ways to improve communication. These suggestions may include the use of effective listening strategies. Your audiologist helps you with follow-up hearing aid checks and repairs.

OTC hearing aids can be purchased without a hearing test or an audiologist. They may be purchased online, at retail stores, or from an audiology clinic. OTC hearing aids are for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. They are not effective for those with greater degrees of hearing loss. You must be 18 years or older to wear OTC hearing aids. Children should never wear them. You may find it helpful to consult with your physician and/or an audiologist before obtaining OTC aids.

Should I consult my doctor?

It is recommended that you consult with a physician before buying an OTC hearing aid if

you have any of the following medical conditions:

- ear deformity
- fluid, pus, or blood coming from the ear
- hearing loss or ringing (tinnitus) that occurs in only one ear or that is noticeably different in one ear
- pain or discomfort in the ear
- history of excessive earwax or the feeling that something is in the ear
- sudden, quickly worsening—or fluctuating—hearing loss
- vertigo or severe dizziness

Should I consult an audiologist?

Purchasing OTC hearing aids does not include the many beneficial services that an audiologist provides, such as:

- the hearing evaluation
- hearing aid orientation and adjustment
- counseling and rehabilitation services

By providing these services, the audiologist ensures that the user receives **quality care and full benefits** from the use of a hearing aid. The audiologist also provides **referral** if the patient needs medical treatment.

If you would like to review more information about OTC hearing aids, please refer to the [ASHA OTC Hearing Aids FAQ](#) webpage.

How do hearing aids differ?

An audiologist can advise you about hearing aid styles, features, and other hearing assistive technology that best meet your communication needs and budget.

Before you get fitted, you can ask your audiologist for a demonstration of the various hearing aids that are available to you.

Which hearing aid is right for me?

To determine your hearing aid needs, the audiologist will ask about your day-to-day life and activities that you enjoy.



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For example, do you:

- Attend meetings, conferences, plays, movies, concerts, or worship services?
- Communicate mostly in one-on-one situations or mostly in groups?
- Participate in sports (either individual or group)?
- Watch TV, talk on the telephone, or travel frequently?

What should I expect from hearing aids?

When you first start wearing your hearing aids, **background noise** may seem loud and distracting. Even your own voice may sound louder. Give it time.

It may take you **several weeks or months** to get used to listening with your hearing aids. Your audiologist can instruct you on how to get the most benefit from your hearing aids.

In most states, you have **at least a 30-day trial period** allowing you to determine that you are benefiting from and wish to keep your hearing aids. It is recommended that you **ask about the trial period** prior to your hearing aid fitting.

The more you wear your hearing aids, the more **your ears and brain will adjust** to the new sounds you are hearing. Your audiologist may also discuss communication strategies, realistic expectations with hearing aids, and additional assistive listening devices that may be helpful.

Will my health insurance pay any of the costs of hearing aids?

Some private health care plans pay for hearing tests, hearing aid evaluations, and even partial or full coverage of hearing aids. **Contact your health insurance company** to find out exactly what is covered. Your plan may include in-network office visits, co-pays, and/or deductibles.

Medicare does not cover hearing aids. Medicaid may cover the cost of hearing aids for adults and must offer coverage for children.

Key points to consider

- Hearing loss does not have to limit you. Properly fitted hearing aids—and the use of good communication strategies—can help you in many listening situations.
- Hearing aids do not return your hearing back to “normal”, but they do help with hearing loss.
- Many people find it helpful to bring a family member or a friend to appointments with their audiologist.
- State regulations may require a medical evaluation and clearance from a licensed physician prior to hearing aid purchase.
- Review all the information about your hearing aids—such as trial period, sales contract, warranty information, and features. Keep this information in a safe place.
- Attend follow-up care orientation and rehabilitation with an audiologist—and be sure to do so within the trial period.
- Talk to your audiologist about problems that you are having with communication or with your hearing aids. The devices may only need a simple adjustment.
- Make appointments to receive regular follow-up care, which will help you adjust to the hearing aids and monitor any changes in your hearing.

If you are concerned about possible hearing loss, it is recommended that you seek evaluation by a licensed and certified audiologist.

Find a certified audiologist on the [ASHA ProFind online directory](#).

Content contributed by ASHA audiologist member Deborah Culbertson, PhD, CCC-A.

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



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Notes:

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



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