

Selecting a Hearing Aid

A hearing aid is the first and most important thing to help you hear. Millions of Americans with hearing loss could benefit from hearing aids but have not obtained them. Consumers are sometimes concerned about the appearance of a hearing aid but a hearing loss is much more conspicuous than a hearing aid.

There is no Consumer Reports type of matrix comparing specific brands or models of hearing aids. That is because it is not like buying a washing machine. Everyone's hearing loss is different.

The hearing aid fitting process typically consists of six stages: assessment, treatment planning, selection, verification, orientation and validation. New technologies have made the process of fitting hearing aids more accurate and efficient. Most hearing aids are programmable, therefore, the skill of the provider is an essential factor in determining consumer satisfaction.

It's important to receive a thorough hearing evaluation by a qualified hearing health professional, an Audiologist, who is trained to evaluate hearing. Audiologists recommend the hearing aid best suited to the individual's lifestyle, listening needs and budget.

There are over 1,000 types and models of hearing aids. Although hearing aids differ in design, type of circuitry, size and amount of amplification, they also have similar components that include: a microphone, amplifier circuitry (to make the sound louder), a receiver (to deliver the amplified sound into the ear), and batteries to power the electronic parts. Hearing aids with digital circuitry are the newest type, but they are also the most expensive. Programmable aids can be customized to fit your needs and there is a wide range of features to consider.

Many hearing aids in use today are equipped with a telecoil. This is an optional feature that couples directly with hearing aid compatible telephones and assistive listening devices such as personal amplification systems, infrared systems and loop systems.

Models of Hearing Aids:

Completely in the canal (CIC). The smallest model for mild to moderate hearing loss.

In the canal (ITC). Not as small as CIC but slightly better power.

In the ear (ITE). Larger than ITC with enough power to benefit a wide range of hearing losses and enough room for some special circuitry.

Behind the ear (BTE). Offers special programming, special coupling ability to other devices, special circuitry and more power.

Body. Housed in a special case that can be carried in a pocket providing the most power for the most severe hearing losses.

Hearing aids vary in terms of the technology that is enclosed in the casing. Types of hearing aids include: **conventional analog hearing aids, analog programmable hearing aids, and digital processing hearing aids.**

Lower end technology allows limited flexibility in programming the hearing aid for the individual's hearing loss and environmental characteristics.

Mid-level technology allows greater flexibility in meeting individual needs and can produce a hearing aid that is fully automatic. This level of technology may include noise reduction, which may make listeners more comfortable in noisy background situations.

The highest level of technology can be completely automatic or user controlled. This level of technology, provides the greatest flexibility and many custom features are available to meet the listener's needs.

Helpful tips when selecting a hearing aid:

- Know your rights about the trial period. Although there will be provider return policies, there may also be state laws to protect you.
- Be aware that it may take a while for the brain to adjust to a hearing aid, so it's not always possible to determine if you will like it right away.
- Bring appropriate expectations: hearing aids may help you communicate more effectively but they do not restore normal hearing.

Be aware that hearing aids do not work well in all situations. Assistive listening devices, used in conjunction with hearing aids, improve hearing aid effectiveness in difficult listening situations, such as noisy restaurants.

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Hearing Loss Association of America www.hearingloss.org

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