

# Getting Hearing Aids that Help You

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ENT North

Hearing aids can be very helpful if you have hearing loss that cannot be fixed with surgery, and which is impacting on your enjoyment and participation in life. You will need to have a hearing test to confirm the type of hearing loss and how bad it is before considering getting hearing aids. Hearing aids are provided by audiologists, not ENT surgeons.

There are a few common 'myths' about hearing aids. The following information is to help to clarify some common misunderstandings:

- An ENT surgeon might tell you that you could benefit from using hearing aids, but the person who actually fits them is an audiologist. Sometimes an ENT surgeon might diagnose a condition that means that hearing aids might cause other health issues for you (a 'contraindication').
- Hearing aids are only helpful if you have difficulty with your hearing in common situations in your day to day life, not just based on your hearing test results.
- Warning signs that you might benefit from aids is if you start withdrawing from social events due to frustration with your ability to hear what is going on, or if your close friends or family are constantly complaining to you about your hearing.
- There is no level of hearing loss where an aid becomes a 'must have'. Some people with terrible hearing cope very well and are very happy with their hearing, while other people with relatively mild hearing loss find it has a massive impact on their function day to day.
- Hearing aids do not protect your hearing, nor slow the rate of decline in your hearing.
- People often think an aid will give them back the same hearing they had at the age of, say, twenty. Unfortunately, this is often overly optimistic. It is designed to give you better hearing than you currently have, and hopefully improve your overall hearing and social function as a result.
- You do need to 'get used to' your aids, and it is often worth wearing them a bit more than you need to when you first get them.
- Your hearing can be so bad that you may not get benefit from aids, or your hearing might get worse over time to the point that your aids are no longer helpful. Some people may then get benefit from a cochlear implant (a 'bionic ear').

## Finding the right hearing aid provider

- You should feel that you trust your audiologist to provide you with an aid that works for your hearing problem, and that they will continue to work with you after you get it to make sure it keeps helping you. If you feel that you don't trust them, smile sweetly, pay the bill for the consultation, and go elsewhere.
- Several of the audiology chains are owned by hearing aid manufacturers (e.g. Bloom Hearing is owned by Widex, Connect Hearing is owned by Phonak, National Hearing Care is owned by Amplifon). If you use these companies, you'll only be offered one brand of aids. This doesn't make it a bad brand, but obviously does restrict your options.
- Companies that are independent of an aid manufacturer will usually prominently display this information on their website. If not, feel free to ask them when you book an appointment.
- Children (<25yo) and pensioners are eligible for free hearing services and aids via Australian Hearing and may also be eligible for free services from other hearing aid providers if they fit certain criteria. More information about this scheme is available at [hearingservices.gov.au](http://hearingservices.gov.au).
- Hearing aids vary dramatically in price. Even the same model might vary in price from one place to another, so it pays to shop around.
- A more expensive aid may not necessarily give you a better hearing outcome - but sometimes it might. Your audiologist should be able (and willing) to explain the reason for their recommending a more expensive aid over a cheaper one.
- Many providers will offer a 'Hearing Aid Trial'. Essentially, you pay a small fee, they recommend a certain aid and you 'loan' it from them for a period of time to see if it works. If it does, you buy it. If not, you return it and can try a different one. Sometimes the cost of the trial will be taken off the price of the aid, sometimes it is an additional fee given the work the audiologist needs to put in. Your aid provider will discuss if they provide this service and how it works.

## Questions you might want to ask your hearing aid provider:

### Improving your hearing overall

- What can I do to maximize the hearing I have?
- What techniques can compensate for my hearing, and how can I get these skills?
- How can friends and family help me with my hearing?

### Choosing your aids:

- What brands of hearing aids do you offer?
- Do you get a commission on the sale of any of the hearing aids that you offer?
- Can I get any of the cost of my aids covered by the Federal Government, or my health insurance?
- How will I pay for my hearing aids? Do I need to pay upfront, or do you offer payment plans?
- Which hearing aid style is best for my hearing loss?
- Which hearing aid style is best for my lifestyle (working, hobbies, social activities)?
- Do I need any accessories?
- Do I need any digital features?
  - What are the benefits of each hearing aid feature, such as directional microphones, automatic volume, feedback reduction, wind reduction and more?
  - Will I be able to operate the programs myself?
  - Do the hearing aids come with a remote control? Do I need a remote control?
  - How do the hearing aids work with my telephone, TV and other devices?
- Do my aids come with a warranty? What kind of services are covered in my warranty and aftercare?
- How long will these hearing aids last?

### Using your aids:

- How do I care for my hearing aids?
- Should I wear my new hearing aids all the time?
- How do I put the hearing aids into my ears?
- How do I change the battery and how will I know when to do it?
- How long do the batteries last, and how much do they cost to replace?

### After-sales service:

- What should I do if my hearing aid doesn't work or if there's an emergency?
- How long does it take to get an appointment with you if I need to see you on short notice?
- What happens if I'm unhappy with my hearing aids?
- Do you offer a hearing aid trial? What happens if I don't like my aids and wish to return them at the end of that trial?