

Hearing Aid Guide

How to buy the best hearing aids to fit your budget and your lifestyle.

At Hart Hearing Centers, we've been providing comprehensive audiology services for over 40 years. We know purchasing hearing aids is an investment. This guide will share our years of experience to help you make the right choice when it comes to hearing aids.

Five Steps to Finding the Best Hearing Aids for You

Welcome to the next generation of hearing aids! Today's hearing aids are the best they've ever been. Technological improvements make today's hearing aids discreet, comfortable to wear, and adaptable in many different situations. Our patients truly love their hearing aids and often tell us they cannot believe they waited so long to get them. If you or someone you love has been living with hearing loss consider this guide the first step to better hearing. **Now let's get started!**

1 Buy the best hearing aids you can afford. There is a difference in the technology at various price levels — quality hearing aids have extremely speedy processors with multiple noise reduction schemes and voice finding features that allow the user to hear and understand speech well; whether in an office, a grocery store, or a noisy restaurant. These features function automatically, without the user having to adjust the instruments themselves. Developing this technology does take time and money, but the results are worth it.

2 Keep in mind that the best hearing aids are made by companies you've never heard of. The most reputable companies spend their money on the research and development mentioned above rather than on constant, expensive national advertising.

3 Expect the best, but do not expect new ears. Hearing aids are great, but they cannot duplicate the incredible sophistication of the human auditory system. You can expect to hear much better than without them, but not the same as when

you were eighteen (nothing much works like it did then). In addition, keep in mind that there will be an adjustment period. Your ears hear sound, but your brain processes the sound, and we all know that the brain is a creature of habit. Be prepared to spend some time learning to listen again.

4 You have two ears, buy two hearing aids. No exceptions. If you want to make sound clearer instead of just louder, you need two. Each aid can be adjusted to accommodate differences in each ear, but ask any professional and the answer will be the same: The human auditory system functions optimally with a binaural signal.

5 Make sure that you are comfortable with the professional you are dealing with. See an audiologist. Verify their credentials and make sure their #1 goal is to find what works for you. You can expect frequent interaction with your audiologist, so go to someone you can trust. For over 40 years, hundreds of physicians, both primary care doctors and specialists, refer their patients to Hart Hearing Centers.

Warranty

Look for a minimum two year warranty on the hearing aids you purchase. A 45-day trial period for hearing aids is required by law, but you should be able to extend that time if needed. Find a practitioner who wants you to wear and benefit from hearing aids, rather than someone who just wants to sell them to you.

Start with a Hearing Test

First, any person who suspects hearing loss needs a diagnostic audiological evaluation. Your audiologist will test you and determine the nature, type, and degree of loss. There are several types of hearing loss:

- Conductive, which refers to a mechanical problem with the transmission of sound through the auditory system, and is sometimes medically treatable.
- Sensorineural, which involves damage to the inner ear. This is the most common type of hearing loss and is rarely able to be treated medically. Sensorineural hearing loss is treated with amplification, that is, with hearing aids or other devices designed to enhance the auditory signal.

Hearing loss may range from mild to severe and may be caused by a variety of conditions, such as:

- Noise exposure
- Heredity
- The normal aging process
- Ototoxic medications
- Infections and other diseases

Your audiologist will determine which type of loss you have and make appropriate recommendations. If the loss requires medical consultation, we will refer you to an appropriate doctor.

More about Sensorineural Hearing Loss

Sensorineural hearing loss occurs gradually over time and typically affects both ears, and most of the time the higher pitched tones are affected first.

Because consonant sounds are higher pitched and carry most of the meaning of speech, those with sensorineural loss will often report that they can hear speech but not understand it very well. The absence of consonant sounds makes it difficult to differentiate between words such as “cat”, “bat”, and “rat”. This loss can truly sound as though people are mumbling, and people with this type of loss may have no idea how much they are missing. Eventually, though, the loss becomes more and more obvious. Individuals may become fatigued, stressed, and distracted from straining to understand at home or at work. People with untreated hearing loss may also withdraw socially, simply because too much effort is required to try to follow conversation. Treating hearing loss early can alleviate these negative situations and maintain social and occupational status. That’s where hearing aids come into the picture.

Types of Hearing Aids

Digital circuitry is definitely the industry standard now, and there are many options which offer very good results, and can fit within any budget. Along with different levels of technology, hearing aids are available in several styles.

- Behind-the-ear
- In-the-ear
- Receiver-in-the-canal, “open fit” hearing aids

Receiver-in-the-canal (RIC) hearing aids, also called open-fit hearing aids, are the newest category of styles. They have an impressive number of advantages over more traditional hearing aids. They sound better, amplify more naturally, and are vastly more comfortable.

You’ve probably also heard of completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids. These aids are very small and were a popular style at one time. We generally do not recommend these aids as they have a higher repair rate, and due to their size, they cannot accommodate the most advanced features that deliver high quality sound.

The best hearing aid depends on your hearing loss, lifestyle, and other factors. This decision is one you and your audiologist can best make together as a team.