



Sound Advice about Hearing Aids

If aging presents a hearing loss, you or a loved one may consider buying a hearing aid. Before you do, determine whether a hearing aid will help you, and what to look for when shopping for one.

Before shopping, however, be sure to get an ear examination from your physician to find out whether there are any underlying medical problems that are causing the hearing loss. Some prescriptions and some diseases can affect hearing, which may or may not be permanent, and which may or may not be improved by a hearing aid.

A hearing aid is an electronic device containing a small microphone that amplifies sounds through a tiny speaker. You must have some ability to hear for the device to work.

The merchants who sell hearing aids are called “dispensers.” They may be audiologists, who are non-medical professionals who specialize in the identification, testing, and rehabilitation of hearing loss. Audiologists are required to have at least a master's degree, or a PhD, and/or an AuD from an accredited college or university. Most audiologists are certified by the American Speech and Hearing Association. They are extensively trained in anatomy and physiology of the auditory mechanism, counseling, diagnostic testing and fitting of hearing aids. Some states require that dispensers and audiologists be licensed by the state. Ask your friends or family members for referrals. You also can check out prospective dispensers with your local Better Business Bureau, consumer protection agency, or state Attorney General.

After the hearing test by your physician, you should get a hearing evaluation from an audiologist. This will help a dispenser or an audiologist select and fit you with an appropriate hearing aid. There are many brands, styles and types of hearing aids, and your particular hearing impairment may require certain choices to get the most effective results from a hearing aid.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) enforces regulations that deal with the manufacture and sale of hearing aids. In addition, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has a website that offers some basic information to the hearing aid consumer, including warranty requirements, trial periods, and purchase agreements (contracts): www.ftc.gov.

Some caution is advisable: don't buy a hearing aid without being fitted, and don't buy from a door-to-door salesperson, or through the mail. The device may be fraudulent or the fit poor – and the fit of the hearing aid is very important to proper functioning. The FDA requires that your hearing aid come with an instruction brochure that describes its operation, use and care, as well as sources for repair and maintenance.

For more information:

www.audiology.org, American Academy of Audiology, 1-800-AAA-2336, for free information.

<http://www.midwestear.com/soundadvice.htm>, Midwest Ear Institute, offers a website with in-depth information about ear health, hearing loss and hearing aid technology. You can access as many as 15 issues of their educational newsletter *Sound Advice*, each focusing on a different topic, such as “What’s New in Hearing Aids,” “Some Suggestions for Coping with a Noisy Restaurant,” and “It Takes Time to Adjust.”

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