

How to be an Informed Consumer

in Today's Overwhelming World of Hearing Aids and Technology

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Main Objective of this Handout:

- To provide helpful information and details to be mindful of when pursuing new hearing aids or helping a friend on their own journey toward better hearing health

Hearing aids: What they are:

Hearing aids are *medical devices* designed to:

- Increase the volume and/or clarity of the speaker's voice to improve communication
- Provide your brain with the appropriate speech sounds to process language and function more effectively
- Enhance your overall health and quality of life
- Used in conjunction with effective counseling and long-term follow-up care

Hearing devices are chosen, customized and programmed based on your:

Individual and specific needs. These include your:

- Hearing loss configuration
- Anatomy: Ear canal shape and size
- Lifestyle and common communication situations
- Physical preferences and limitations
- Perceptual auditory system (How YOU prefer to hear), and
- Your listening goals

Hearing aids: What they are **NOT**:

- **Not** a product or personal electronic device
- **Not** a one-size-fits-all solution
- **Not** intended to be used on an "as-needed" basis
- **Not** a "miracle" solution that will return your hearing to normal
- **Not** a "quick fix"
- Will **not** completely 'eliminate' ambient or background noises

Advice on where to begin on your journey toward better hearing:

1. Assess your needs

- Evaluate where you are having difficulty?
 - Ask your friends and family members
- Identify three **specific** listening situations where you would like to hear better and write them down
 - Make sure these include specific listening environments and people that are important to you

2. Receive a Comprehensive Audiological Examination and Consultation

Your Personal Consultation Should:

- Assess your personal communication needs and medical history
- Evaluate your hearing ability and review/explain the results
 - Which sounds of speech are you missing?
 - How well do you understand speech in quiet and in background noise?
 - Are there any “red flags” another medical professional needs to evaluate?
- Discuss hearing health and options available to you to improve communication
- Make a professional recommendation and tell you WHY
 - What is the best option for you based on your personal profile?
 - Are hearing aids warranted or is a different solution more appropriate?
- Answer your questions
 - Ask if you can experiment with the devices at home or in the office

More Questions to Consider

- Do I have any physical limitations with the dexterity of my fingers, hands, shoulders, or arms?
- Do I have any limitations with my vision?
- Do I have tinnitus? Do I need specific tinnitus management options?
 - Tinnitus is the perception of sounds that are not really there
 - It can resemble ringing/buzzing/whooshing/hissing/etc.
- Are loud sounds uncomfortable or painful?
- Am I willing to put in the time and effort to insure the hearing devices are comfortable and accommodating my specific needs?
- Are there support groups available to me?

*You can refer to the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Consumer Checklist for more questions to consider

A Team Approach: You and your hearing healthcare provider

When you are considering hearing devices, you are investing in a service and working with a healthcare provider to decide on the best plan of action to fit your needs.

You are making an investment not only in a product, but also a relationship with a group of professionals you can be confident will use their knowledge, experience and expertise to ensure the best quality of care for you and your hearing devices now and in the **future**.

Your Provider

- Who will be assessing your needs, making the recommendation, and fitting your devices? What are his/her credentials?
- Did he/she address hearing vs. understanding?
- Did he/she explain why certain devices are appropriate for you?
- Does he/she appear to be well-educated and well-versed on new technologies and different features which would benefit you?
- Do you feel your hearing capabilities, listening situations, goals, and style and hearing preferences were taken into account when the recommendation was made?

- Does he/she work with a variety of different manufactures or tied to just one?
- Did he/she listen to your communication needs and answer your specific questions?
- Were customized ear molds recommended?
- Were other communication strategies or assistive devices recommended?
- Did he/she discuss/explain other ways to improve and enhance communication?
 - Telecoils and Loop systems
 - Bluetooth accessories
 - Remote controls
- Is this someone you are comfortable with and trust?
- Will the facility provide consistency in your care now and in the future?

Good Questions to Ask your Provider

- Were your insurance benefits checked?
- Is there demonstration or trial period before you make a decision?
- Does the cost of the hearing devices come with a warranty and what does this entail?
- Was information about the trial period and refund policy reviewed?
- Will you receive a written contract detailing the services to be provided?

*How will you know the hearing devices are programmed appropriately for you?

Verification

- Verification, also called visual speech mapping or real-ear, is a special measurement tool used to verify your hearing devices are working properly and functioning appropriately for you.
- This test will take your hearing levels and the size and shape of your individual ear canal into account to ensure you are receiving the appropriate amount of volume across the range of speech sounds.
- Ask if this test will be part of the fitting process.

Remember, you are making an investment in your health, your personal and professional relationships, and your overall quality of life. Be sure to educate yourself and ask the right questions to ensure you receive the comfort, consistency, and quality of care you deserve.