

SELECTING AIDS FOR YOUR PERSONAL LIFESTYLE AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT AUDIOLOGIST FOR YOU

- Consider lifestyle first and cost last.
- One hearing aid is about as good as another in a quiet environment.
- A mild or moderate hearing loss should be able to utilize the Entry Level and Basic Level hearing aids.
- Severe and Profound hearing loss individuals should consider the Advanced and Premium Level but in addition, make sure the aids provide sufficient amplification power so they are not operating at the aids maximum capability early on.
- An active lifestyle in various environments should dictate Advanced and Premium Level aids
- High technology users should be best suited for Premium Level aids.
- Costs run according to features/technology so the least expensive aids would be the Entry Level and most costly the Premium.
- Don't feel you have to over-buy to be safe as almost all providers have a 30-60 money back period which presents an opportunity to return or get full value on a trade-up. Just make sure you have a clear understanding of your options before you buy.
- Don't forget that manufacturer's claims are based on controlled laboratory conditions and not the real world. The same thing applies when an Audiologist asks how you hear in the office setting. The real world begins when you walk out the door.

CHECKLIST FOR BUYERS

1. Gather Information

- Obtain the 2011 Consumer's Guide to Hearing Aids (not Consumers Report) to preliminarily get a feel for options, the cost differences between the four levels (Entry-Basic-Advanced-Premium) and features that appeal to you. (SEE FORUM FOR INFORMATION ON ORDERING THIS \$5.00 PUBLICATION-known free sources are New Sound-Jones-Estes-Austin Hearing and: <http://www.hearing-aid.com/Free-Consumer-Guide>)
- Ask friends and neighbors who and what they like, why and determine their degree of hearing loss because that makes a big difference in what might be useful to you.

2. **Get a thorough hearing evaluation and at least one second option**

- This should include an Audiogram and explanation of the results. Always get a copy at the time of the test and retain it for future reference and comparison with other tests obtained later to track you loss.
- Ask about the evaluation cost (most can be obtained at no charge whether you buy aids or not). Watch for advertised specials for free evaluations.
- Discuss your needs based on your lifestyle, features and controls available and their relevance.
- Take notes as they will be important evaluation tools and will help eliminate later confusion.
- You should now have a good idea of your hearing range and what aids are suitable to your loss and living style.
 - Open fit: Preferred but generally only suitable for MILD TO MODERATE loss.
 - Closed fit: Less desirable and generally suitable for SEVERE TO PROFOUND loss. This fit is necessary to deliver sufficient gain to the ears and is generally combined with RIC's, large tubes, power domes and molds. If you have a profound loss seriously question

the Audiologist if they suggest thin tubes as you can't change after purchase. If molds come "free" (part of the bundled servicing cost) with the aids and you do not have them made at the time of purchase you could find yourself in a situation where you can't get them done easily or at all (bird in the hand).

3. Do comparison shopping

- Now is the time to visit several providers who offer different makes of hearing aids and demo them during the free trial period with the initial intent of returning them without buying.
- A 30 day trial period is mandated by law but it is not required to be free and usually isn't. \$50-\$150 is often charged as a "stocking fee" or some other descriptive term commonly absorbed in the price of the aids if purchased. Ask questions and make sure you have it in writing.
- During the trial period make a concerted effort to expose yourself to every possible environment as quickly as possible as the trial period goes by very fast. Keep notes as to how the aids perform, questions and list perceived deficiencies. Schedule ahead for weekly revisits to provide time for adjustments and evaluation of adjustments.
- It is now time for you to determine the cost of the aids so you can make an intelligent cost/benefit analysis. If the price seems too good to be true it probably is. The person making the mistake will not be the seller it will be the buyer.
- Overbuying generally serves no worthwhile purpose since most providers have a trade-up policy. Be sure to ask about it.
- Buying aids that can't perform to the needs of your hearing loss based on a low price alone will likely be a mistake.

- Always ask if a less expensive aid an option for you. How this question is answered is as important as a yes or no. Ask for an explanation which should lead into features, specifications, technology and platforms. New models-New Platforms-New “evolutionary” features=more dollars because of research and development costs.

4.

1. **Choose a qualified hearing specialist**

- This may be the most important step and by this time you may already have identified this person.
- This must be someone you can trust, a person with whom you can communicate and whose judgment you value.
- Consider and evaluate their education, experience, and reputation. Determine how long they have been in business and the extent of their roots in the area as this is a volatile business.
- Get the full name and state license number and confirm the status on-line with the Texas Department of State Health Services
<https://vo.dshs.state.tx.us/datamart/searchByNameTXRAS.do?anchor=ffddc31.0>
- Are they easy to get to for follow-up visits?
- Can you get an appointment within one week?

5. **Making the final purchase**

- Get a written contract outlining the cost of aids and services in detail. Make sure the contract discloses the full name and license number of the Audiologist.
- Know the return policy and get it in writing with all details.
- Understand your warranty. Get a copy of the full terms and conditions of warranty (not just a summary). Make sure the warranty term is clearly stated in writing.
- Obtain in writing an itemized list of service(s) provided for in the purchase price and for what time period. In addition obtain an itemized list of other benefits offered and the cost of each.

- Do the aids have Bluetooth capability for wireless phone use, TV streaming, stereo or computer sound directly to the hearing aids?
- Do the aids have T-coil for use with inductive looping?

EVALUATE HOW AIDS SOUND

- You should expect a dramatic improvement in hearing
- The quality of the sound you hear may take some getting used to.
- Your ability to hear and understand others should be improved.
- Other people's voices shouldn't sound distorted, harsh, tinny, raspy, sharp, booming, muffled or artificial.
- The sound of your own voice should be "normal," not tinny, harsh, or distorted. Your own voice should not sound like you're in a barrel, have an echo or feedback (squeal).
- The intensity and quality of familiar sounds should be sharp, bright and clear—not dull or irritating.
- The amount of sound you hear should match the environment. In a crowded room with many people talking at once, sound will be loud but not deafening.
- Hearing aids should help you distinguish speech from noise. Hearing aids should be adjusted to optimize this feature.
- When properly tuned, hearing aids should help you identify the location of a sound or voice.

EVALUATE HOW AIDS FEEL

- They should fit like a shoe or another item of clothing, your hearing aids must be comfortable in order to ensure you can and will wear them.
- You should not feel as though your ears are plugged nor should you experience pressure, discomfort or pain of any kind.

- Hearing aids should not move or whistle when you chew, swallow or smile.

EVALUATE IF AIDS ARE WORKING PROPERLY

- Your hearing aids should help you understand and communicate in a variety of sound environments.
- Depending on the level of technology recommended by your hearing professional, your hearing aids may switch automatically or manually between memory settings for different sound environments.
- Hearing and communicating in quiet environments (home, work, and doctor's office) should be improved.
- Your ability to hear and understand speech in environments with background noise (restaurants, dinner parties, environments with fans or A/C running) should be improved.
- Your hearing aids should help you understand speech in environments where there is reverberation (lecture halls, worship spaces, movie theaters).
- Loud sounds (sirens, traffic, construction sounds) should not be uncomfortable but you should hear them clearly.

WHAT AUDIOLOGISTS SHOULD NOT DO

- After recommending and selling aids to a patient including the cost of servicing for an extended period of time Audiologists should never tell a patient "I have done all I can for you".

DON'T EXPECT AN AUDIOLOGIST TO

- Tell you about a product not available through them that is better suited to your needs and/or less expensive.

- Always be there. Not only do they come and go, they will relocate, merge and change personnel in a manner similar to most small businesses.