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Purchasing a hearing aid: A checklist

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This consumer checklist is drawn from our *Consumer Reports* testing and shopping experience, our audiology consultants, and from the resources of the [Hearing Loss Association of America](#), an advocacy and support group. Ideally, you should make sure the provider offers what's listed below:

1. Initial visit to the provider (typically an audiologist or hearing aid/instrument specialist)

The provider or the office:

- Has convenient business hours.
- Makes it easy to schedule an appointment.
- Describes the provider's training and experience, and provides a business card with this information.
- Provides information on demand on up-to-date state licenses.
- Offers walk-in repair service.

You:

- Bring a family member, significant other, or friend.
- Take notes during visits.

2. Medical clearance and other basics

The provider:

- Requires a medical examination, or asks if your ears have been checked recently by an ear, nose, and throat doctor or other licensed physician.

OR:

- Has you sign a waiver required by the Food and Drug Administration in lieu of a medical exam. (The waiver allows you to exercise the right to make your own decisions but only after stating, for example, that your best health interests would be served if you had a medical evaluation by a licensed physician before purchasing a hearing aid or aids.)

3. Testing and lifestyle information

The provider:

- Discusses with you the effect of hearing loss on your lifestyle and relationships at home, work, school, or when going out, for example (or has you complete a questionnaire). The questions should include how well you hear conversations on the telephone.
- Asks about your manual dexterity (your ability to handle small batteries or controls, for example) and/or vision problems that might affect your ability to handle hearing aids.
- Gives you the opportunity to discuss your lifestyle, interests, and activities, which might affect the choice of styles and features.
- Gives you the opportunity to discuss the listening situations, such as noisy or large rooms, theaters, or meetings, in which you have the most difficulty hearing.
- Tests your hearing in a soundproof booth and conducts other hearing tests (to gauge your ability to understand certain words and sentences, for instance).
- Gives you a copy of the hearing test results and fully explains them.
- Discusses realistic expectations (what hearing aids will and will not do).

4. Picking brands, styles, features, and controls

The provider:

- Mentions which hearing-aid brands he or she works with, and why he or she recommends a particular brand for you.
- Reviews the pros and cons (including cost trade-offs) of different hearing-aid styles and features (such as Bluetooth, remote control, [telecoil](#), feedback suppression, noise reduction, and manual-volume control).
- Considers your personal preferences concerning style, aesthetics, color, cost, and features.

5. Picking up your new hearing aid

Testing:

- **The provider conducts a real-ear test to properly adjust the aid** as well as other tests of hearing and understanding speech in quiet and noisy environments.

6. Use and maintenance

The provider:

- Asks you if the aid and/or ear molds fit comfortably, and makes necessary adjustments while you wait.
- Discusses the battery type for your hearing aid, battery life, the handling of batteries, where to buy them, where to store them, and the importance of keeping spare batteries handy.
- Explains controls (for volume and program changes, for instance) and has you practice using them.
- Discusses what squealing (feedback) means, and what to do about it.
- Reviews how to insert the aids, including discerning right from left.
- Teaches you how to clean and store the hearing aids and keep them free of wax.
- Explains precautions, such as not getting the units wet and removing them during radiological and other diagnostic testing.
- Has you practice using the telephone with your aids.
- Discusses why you don't need a telecoil (if your chosen aid doesn't have the feature).
- Outlines a schedule for wearing the aids until you get used to them.
- Advises you to keep track of when and where the aids help and don't help, so adjustments can be made.

7. Financial issues and contract details

You:

- Get a written contract detailing the cost of the aids, the cost of the provider's services, the number of follow-up visits included in the cost, the brand and model of the hearing aids, and the date and place of sale.
- Try bargaining for a lower price with the provider, or ask for a lower-priced model.

The provider:

- Helps you determine what your health insurance will pay toward the aids.
- Mentions other potential ways to offset the cost of your hearing aids.
- Offers to sell you loss/damage insurance that will go into effect when the warranty expires.

8. Disclosure

The provider:

- Explains and offers written information about the trial period, fees charged if you return the aids within the trial period, options for trying a different model, and whether the trial period is suspended if you have to wait for a repair.
- Explains the length of the warranty period and what is and is not covered (e.g., replacing a lost aid and repairing or replacing a nonfunctioning ones).
- Offers to be flexible about the trial period and/or other aspects of purchase.
- Gives you a copy of the product brochure and reviews its contents with you in detail.
- Schedules a follow-up appointment with you to make sure everything is working properly.
- Calls you at home a few days after the initial fitting to see how you are doing.

9. Proper fitting, adjustment

The provider:

- **Conducts verification tests, including a real-ear test.** This test, also called a real-ear measure, involves placing a thin probe in your ear while you're wearing your hearing aid to measure the match between your hearing loss and the response of your hearing aid.
- Asks you how the hearing aids improve your understanding of others at home, at work, in meetings, in restaurants, and in other quiet and noisy situations.
- Answers your questions and concerns about any discomfort and/or difficulty of use.
- Makes adjustments to the aids based on your comments.
- Teaches you troubleshooting strategies to fix problems yourself.
- Reviews use and maintenance tips.

10. Using hearing aids with other technologies

The provider:

- Discusses the compatibility of your aids with cell phones and other cordless phones.
- Discusses using or supplementing your hearing aids with assistive listening devices such as FM and infrared systems, and audio loops.
- Mentions other assistive and safety devices, such as light-up doorbells, special smoke alarms, and vibrating alarm clocks.

11. Other support

- The provider offers group hearing-aid orientations.
- You go to orientations or plan to go.
- You join a support group in your area and/or online.