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What you Need to Know when buying a Hearing Aid

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**Hearing aids** can't restore perfect hearing. They help you use the hearing you have left to improve your speech understanding.

They make sound louder so that you can hear it, but will not necessarily always make everything clear. Hearing aids will benefit most people with a hearing loss, but any hearing aid audiologist or company that promises to give you perfect hearing is giving you unrealistic expectations. Remember when you are buying a hearing aid you are buying a process and not a product.

**Things you need to consider if you are thinking of getting a hearing aid:**

If you think you have a hearing loss, see your GP first who will check your ears to see if you need further medical examination or treatment.

If you can, try to contact more than one hearing aid practice to investigate what they offer you and how much they charge. Do remember that you may be charged for your hearing test.

Be very wary of responding to adverts offering free or cheap listening devices, or information on better hearing. Some companies use high-pressure selling tactics and may try to sell you expensive hearing aids.

Be aware that some firms will only sell and fit products from one or two hearing aid manufacturers, while others will be able to offer a wider range of products. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, and make sure you receive all quotations in writing. A good practice will explain the nature of your hearing loss and will emphasise the necessity of habilitation and make provision for reviews after fitting.

Don’t accept a home visit from a hearing aid audiologist unless this is what you really want. You may prefer to visit their premises so that you can leave when you want, rather than inviting one to visit you in your home.
you do accept a home visit make sure they send you advance notice of their visit so you can cancel if you want to.

Whether you visit the hearing aid audiologist, or are visited by them in your home, you may want to have someone with you for support and to make sure you don’t mishear something. Good practices will recommend this.

If you know someone who has bought a hearing aid privately, ask them if they would recommend the person they dealt with. What was the back-up service like? Remember that their hearing loss is unlikely to be the same as yours, so their hearing aid may not necessarily be the right one for you.

Avoid ‘dispensers’ who hold ‘exhibitions’ in hotels etc. Be careful when buying from a ‘dispenser’ who is ‘visiting’ your area without a regular clinic. Check that you will be able to contact them easily in the future. You will need to be able to see them if you have a problem with your hearing aid and need to get it adjusted, repaired or serviced.

What happens when I see the hearing aid audiologist?
Your hearing will be assessed. The range of tests carried out can vary, but they must include:

An air conduction hearing test
In this test, you listen to tones (bleeps) through headphones and tell the audiologist which ones you can hear.

A bone conduction hearing test
In this test, you wear a special headband that conducts sound through the bones of your skull. When the results are compared with what you heard through the headphones in the air conduction test, they show whether you have a problem with your eardrum or middle ear.

In addition to these speech tests may be performed which check your understanding of lists of words. You will get your results in an audiogram. This is a graph that shows how well you hear low, middle and high tones.

Once your hearing has been tested, a discussion will follow as to which
kind of hearing aid will be best for you. Most people benefit from wearing a hearing aid in each ear, rather than just one. Find out if there is a reduction for two. Also, ask for information about all the different types of aids that might suit you and their prices. Be wary if you are not given any choices.

If you decide to buy a hearing aid, an impression of your ear will be taken. It will be sent to a laboratory for the ear-mould, or the casing, if it is an In-the-ear aid to be made.

When this is ready, you will need another visit to the hearing aid audiologist. This is to have the hearing aid fitted and programmed to suit your hearing loss and explanation as to how to use it.

After-care appointments should be arranged after fitting your hearing aid. It is important that you keep these appointments, as it may be necessary to adjust or fine-tune the hearing aid for you to get the best results from your system.

You may want to take the following tips with you when you attend your appointment to make sure you cover the important points:

Are you getting the hearing aid you want at a price you can afford? If you pay PRSI or are a dependent of a PRSI payer you may be entitled to a Treatment Benefit Scheme grant of 50% of the cost up to a maximum of €830 for each hearing aid. You can obtain a form from your hearing aid audiologist or the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Hearing aids are tax deductible in your own right or by a ‘relative’ purchasing for you.

Does the price quoted include the cost of hearing tests, the hearing aid audiologist’s time, follow-up appointments, and, for behind-the-ear types, the earmould and tubing? How long will it be before you have to start paying to see the hearing aid audiologist?
If you have problems, for example your hearing aid breaking down or needing adjustment, will they be addressed within a reasonable timeframe?

You should receive a trial period with a money-back guarantee so that you can return the hearing aid if it does not suit you despite modification. If the hearing aid audiologist isn’t prepared to offer this and suggests a guarantee for repair only, instead of giving you the option of a refund, go somewhere else. You are unlikely to get a full refund because the price you pay usually includes the hearing tests and fitting. You will have to pay for repairs after the guarantee on the hearing aid runs out. The cost of these can mount up. More than 90% of repairs are caused by blockage or moisture, so daily cleaning is essential.

If extended guarantees are available which can be useful in the case of in-the-ear aids, ensure they are value for money. Guarantee periods range between one and two years, so find out what the period is for the hearing aids you are being offered. You can usually insure your hearing aid against loss or damage through your house insurance, but it’s a good idea to check this with your household insurance company first, before you buy the hearing aid.

It is important that qualified personnel carry out audiological assessment and the prescribing and fitting of hearing aids. This is necessary to ensure that a treatable medical condition, or a medical condition which requires intervention, is not missed. It also ensures safe impression taking procedures are utilised and appropriate amplification is prescribed following audiometric evaluation so as not to put at risk the patient’s residual hearing.

Hearing aid audiologists in private practice who are members of the Irish Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists have the letters MISHAA or FISHAA, after their name. You can find a list of members, their Code of Professional Conduct and other details on their website: www.ishaa.ie. Some firms employ a significant number of unqualified personnel who do the work of a hearing aid audiologist.