

The following article was written by an audiologist with a consumer who also worked as a rehabilitation counselor, to provide tips to consumers who purchase hearing aids from an audiologist.

Building a Partnership for Better Hearing

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Too many hearing aids end up unused in dresser drawers. This leaves too many people with hearing loss continuing to struggle in isolation without the benefit of amplification. And leaves too many families experiencing the pain and frustration of miscommunication and misunderstandings.

TEAMWORK WORKS!

An audiologist is an expert in hearing loss and hearing aid technology.
YOU are the expert on yourself, your lifestyle and your needs.

THE BEST RESULTS HAPPEN WHEN YOU AND YOUR ADUIOLOGIST COLLABORATE
TOGETHER AS A TEAM.

What your audiologist wants to know about you:

- The degree and type of hearing loss you have.
- Your previous hearing aid experience.
- Any physical limitations you have (for example: limited manual dexterity).
- The truth about your listening environments.
- What your expectations are for hearing aids.

STEP 1: FIND AN ACCREDITED PROFESSIONAL

- Look for someone who will listen to your concerns and will take the time to answer all of your questions.
- If you do not feel comfortable with the professional after your initial visit, ask for a copy of your test and take it someplace else. Your hearing test is part of your medical record; you are allowed to have access to it.
- Besides your doctor, ask friends or family who wear hearing aids for recommendations of professionals they feel did a good job and treated them well.

STEP 2: PREPARE FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

- You are not "causing a problem" if you discuss negative aspects of your hearing aid experience or your perceptions of the hearing aids.

- Think about those times your hearing gives you the most difficulty. (Family and friends can help you identify times and situations where you miss things.)
- Set 3-5 specific goals of where and when you would like to experience an improvement in your hearing ability. **Make a list and bring it with you to your first appointment.**
- Read as much as you can about hearing aids. Your audiologist can explain options and features that you've read about such as directional microphones, digital volume controls, telecoils, memory buttons, remote controls, and technology in general.
- Organizations such as HLAA and AARP write informative articles about a variety of issues including hearing aids. Read those and jot down ideas for features that you want to ask the audiologist about.
- Talk to family and friends and find out what they like and don't like about their hearing aids, but remember that everyone's hearing loss is different. What works for Aunt Jenny may or may not work for you.
- **Write down your ideas.** This will help your audiologist have a better idea of what you are looking for. He or she will also be able to discuss the feasibility of each option and feature for your type of hearing loss. Not all features and styles are appropriate for every person or every type of hearing loss.
- Most health insurance plans do not cover hearing aids. It is a good idea to check with your insurance provider.
- If the price of the hearing aids would cause you not to buy them, ask if a more basic model will meet your needs. Also ask about resources for financial assistance.
- REMEMBER you have the right to return the hearing aid within the trial period established by your state. Check for state laws that apply, and what fees the dispenser is entitled to when the hearing aid is returned within the trial period.

STEP 3: THE FITTING

- Bring a family member or friend with you (someone you spend much of your time with).
- Be prepared to jot down notes.
- Be patient with yourself.

STEP 4: YOU'VE JUST BEEN FITTED. NOW WHAT?

- Wear your hearing aids as much as you can at first to give your ears (and your brain) a chance to adjust and relearn how to hear.
- Give yourself some time to get used to how things sound. It is likely that sounds will not seem natural or "normal" at first.
- Contact your audiologist immediately if the hearing aids are causing pain, soreness or irritation.
- If your hearing aids have manual adjustments and options, experiment and play with them to explore how and when they improve your listening abilities.

STEP 5: PREPARING FOR YOUR FOLLOW-UP(S)

- The number one thing to prepare for the follow-up: **wear the devices every day!** (Unless you experience discomfort)
- Make a note of those times and situations where you notice improvement in your ability to hear and communicate.
- List those situations and environments that are still giving you trouble. That gives the audiologist an opportunity to more fully explain how you can utilize your hearing aids more effectively.
- Bring along that list and any questions or concerns to your follow-up visits.
- Don't just say "it's okay" or "it's lousy". Being specific helps with fine tuning.
- Be honest with your audiologist about when and how you use the hearing aids.
- Be willing to accept advice and counseling.
- Be ready to give your audiologist the feedback and information he or she needs to custom fit your hearing aids to meet your listening and comfort needs.
- REMEMBER if you are not doing well despite several sessions with your audiologist **to return the hearing aid within the trial period.** If one type of hearing aid does not work well for you, exchange these hearing aids and try something different.

Consumers & audiologists want the same thing:

TO IMPROVE YOUR ABILITY TO HEAR & COMMUNICATE

We achieve that by acting as partners with each other.

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This article is adapted from a presentation given by the authors at the Vermont Expo in Brattleboro on October 28, 2006 and is posted with permission from the authors.