

What You Need to Know Before You Buy a Hearing Aid

Buying a hearing aid can be an intimidating and daunting experience for even those who are experienced hearing aid wearers, let alone those who are new to the process. Here is some information that may give you more confidence in your search, help you feel more comfortable and familiar with the process, and more satisfaction with the hearing aids that you ultimately end up with. If you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed below then please contact one of the audiologists or hearing practitioners in your area or contact the audiologist at Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre. The IDHHC audiologists have the professional expertise to answer some of your questions and to advise you if needed.

The information included is presented in a question and answer format. We hope you find it useful and would appreciate any comments you can pass on that will improve the quality of the material we are making available to individuals.

1. Where do I go to find out if I need a hearing aid?
 - You need to go to a private hearing clinic. Private hearing clinics are listed in the Yellow Pages of the phonebook under Hearing Aids and Audiologists.
 - You can also do an online search of hearing clinics in this area and get the information.

2. How do I know which of the many hearing clinics listed I should go to?
 - Talk to people who wear hearing aids to find out where they go and what their experiences are; this may help you in making a decision.
 - If you are a Person with Disability (PWD) and you are living in Victoria, call the Cook Street Hearing Clinic 250-388-2250. Hearing aids are paid for by the government if you qualify through this clinic or provide your Personal Health Number (PHN/Care Card) to your hearing instrument service provider to verify your eligibility for coverage.

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- For PWD outside of the Victoria area, provide your Personal Health Number (PHN/Care Card) to your hearing instrument service provider to verify your eligibility for coverage.
- You need to be comfortable with your test, recommendations and your interaction with your hearing health care practitioner; if you are not you should go for a second opinion.
- It may be beneficial to go to a hearing clinic that is close and accessible, as future appointments for follow-up, adjustments or hearing aid maintenance will be required.

3. Who will I see?

- You will see either a Registered Audiologist (RAUD) or Registered Hearing Instrument Practitioner (RHIP).
- An audiologist has at a minimum, a Master's Degree from a University and has specialized in assessing, managing and rehabilitating hearing loss. They are also certified by Speech-Language and Audiology Canada.
- A hearing instrument practitioner has 2 years of post-secondary education and a diploma from a hearing aid dispensing college approved by the BC College of Hearing Health Professionals.
- In BC, an audiologist must also be a hearing instrument practitioner to dispense hearing aids.
- The governing body for both audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners is the College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of BC.
- Your audiologist or hearing instrument practitioner must be registered by the College.

4. What should I know before I go for my hearing test:

- When you first noticed problems hearing

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- Has your hearing difficulties been gradual or sudden
- If there is a difference in hearing between your ears
- If you experience any ear pain, discomfort, or discharge
- If you have any ringing or buzzing in your ears
- If you have worked in noise
- If there is a family history of hearing loss
- Some hearing health care practitioners may ask you to have your ears checked for wax by your physician before your appointment
- Avoid loud noise for 24 hours prior to your hearing test if possible

5. Where do you notice you are having difficulties hearing and what kind of difficulties are you having (e.g. speech is loud enough but not clear on the phone, the volume of the TV is too soft when I watch TV with my family)?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

6. Where do others notice you are having difficulties hearing?

It is a good idea to check with those closest to you; spouse, children, friends, and coworkers as you may not always be aware you are not hearing properly.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

7. What is the difference between a hearing test and a hearing screening?

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- A hearing test or assessment is a comprehensive battery of tests that includes: pure tone test results (audiogram)
 - Speech testing
 - Impedance testing
 - Loudness discomfort level testing
 - Other; otoacoustic emissions; speech in noise testing
- A hearing screening is limited to the pure tone results only and does not provide enough information to fit or recommend a hearing aid.

8. When the results have been explained you should know your hearing loss

- Type: R ear _____
L ear _____
- Degree: R ear _____
L ear _____
- Word Understanding: R ear _____
L ear _____

9. What are some other questions I should ask my hearing health professional?

- What caused my hearing loss?
- How does my hearing loss affect my ability to hear speech sounds and other sounds in my environment?
- Do I need to see a physician?
- Will hearing aids help and how?
- Do I need one hearing aid or two?
- If my finances are limited, what are my options?
- How can I protect the hearing I still have?

10. What situations would I like the hearing aid to help me in?

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This is important information as it will help your hearing health care practitioner decide on the features or accessories you may need in your hearing aid. (Situations identified may be the same as #5 or you may only have 1 or 2 situations where you would really like to hear better).

Pick your top 3 or 4 and be as specific as you can.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

11. How do I know which make and model of hearing aid is the best for me?

- You won't, nor should you try.
- Hearing aids are very sophisticated and different models (even though they look the same) can do very different things to sound.
- You have to trust your hearing health care practitioner's recommendations and selection implicitly.
- If you have any concerns about their recommendations, discuss them with your hearing health care practitioner or consider going for a second opinion elsewhere.
- The information you give your hearing health care practitioner about situations where you would like to hear better is important in selecting the suitable brand and model of hearing aid for you.
- The features you need in a hearing aid are also dependent on your hearing loss and your lifestyle. Be sure you know the features that have been selected for you, how to access and use them and when to use them.
- A general rule of thumb is: the more features the hearing aid has the higher the cost of the hearing aid. Don't pay for features you won't use.
- Some features that are useful to many are:

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Directional Microphones – pick up sound from the front and decrease sound from behind

T-coils – allows you to connect to telephone and other assistive technology

Compression – less amplification of loud sounds and more amplification of soft sounds.

Wireless capability – allows connection to items such as a hearing aid remote, TV, phone, and other assistive devices.

- Most clinics only deal with a few of the many brands of hearing aids available.
- Hearing health care practitioners will have their brand preferences. Enquire what brands they deal with and what their reasons for doing so are. Are they able to order in a different brand of hearing aid if it is needed?
- Your hearing health care practitioner's skill in programming a hearing aid may be a factor in the final selection process. If they are experienced with a certain aid they may be able to program it to fit you specific needs better than one they are not familiar with.

12. Which style of hearing aid is best for me?

The styles available are:

- Behind-the-ear (BTE)
- In-the-ear (ITE)
- In-the-canal (ITC)
- Completely in the canal (CIC)
- Receiver in the canal (RIC - open fit)

The style best for you is determined by:

- Degree and configuration of your hearing loss
- Individual preferences and lifestyle
- Presence of dexterity or visual problems

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- Compatibility with other devices

When you are discussing style with your audiologist/hearing instrument practitioner know why the particular style they are recommending was selected and ask about the differences between the styles.

13. What should I expect from my hearing aids?

- Adjusting to a hearing aid takes time; expect an adjustment period. It can take 60 to 90 days or more to adjust to a hearing aid.
- Begin wearing your hearing aid in relatively quiet environments and gradually increase the amount of noise in your listening environment.
- Begin wearing your hearing aids for short periods of time and gradually increase the amount of time you are wearing the hearing aid.
- Your goal is to wear the hearing aids all day, every day.
- Even the very best and most expensive hearing aid may not help with all of your communication difficulties.
- You may need to go back and have your hearing aid adjusted. If it is uncomfortable in any way (how it feels or what it does to sound) go back to see your dispenser. Follow up visits are covered in the cost of the hearing aid and are a necessary part of the process for many.
- Hearing aids do not restore your hearing to normal. The more your ear distorts sound the less effective the hearing aid will be.
- Some “hearing problems” are related to changes in the brain. Over time the brain becomes slower at processing information. Speech is a very rapid signal. A hearing aid cannot restore processing time.
- As we age we become less tolerant of background noise. Older individuals with normal hearing require a quieter background to hear at their best than young people with normal hearing. A hearing aid cannot completely overcome the challenge of the effects of listening in noise.

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- There is other technology available that can be paired with hearing aids to help overcome these challenges.
14. What information should I bring to my follow up appointments with my hearing health care practitioner to help them fine tune and make appropriate adjustments to my hearing aids?
- Know the listening situations that are successful/unsuccessful.
 - Know the sounds that are too loud or too soft. Be as detailed as you can be.
 - Let your hearing health care practitioner know which of the features and controls you can use properly and which you are having difficulty with.
 - Let your hearing health care practitioner know how the aids sound with TV, phone, in quiet, in noise.
 - Let your hearing health care practitioner know how the hearing aids feel. They should be comfortable enough that you can wear them all day and in all situations.
15. What else should I know or ask about?
- You are entitled to a trial period of 30 days; many clinics offer more than this. What is the trial period of the clinic you are going to? If you return the hearing aids within this trial period you will get a refund. Some monies may be kept for the testing, fitting, etc.
 - Many clinics are now giving a 6 month to 3 year supply of batteries with the purchase of hearing aids.
 - Hearing aids come with warranties for both repair and loss or damage. What is the warranty period on the hearing aids for each?
 - If my hearing aid is sent for repair can I get a loaner?
 - The life of hearing aids is considered to be 5 – 7 years.
 - Batteries need to be changed frequently; 5 to 10 days is common.

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- Hearing aids that use larger batteries have longer battery life.
- Hearing aid technology is changing very rapidly. Find out what the current changes to technology are and how these developments can help you.
- Does your house insurance cover your hearing aids in the event they are lost after the original loss and damage warranty expires? If not, you may need to have a rider placed on your insurance.

16. What is available beyond hearing aids?

A very effective strategy in coping with a hearing loss is to get close to the person you are talking to or the thing you want to hear. Sometimes you cannot do this physically but you can with equipment that attaches to your hearing aid. You do need T-coils in order to access much of the assistive technology available. Below are some of the systems available:

- **Bluetooth:** Bluetooth is a wireless signal that allows two devices to communicate with each other. The range of Bluetooth is limited (20-30 feet) but it allows you to pair to a cell phone, TV, phone, so the signal from these devices feeds into your hearing aid via a streamer that you wear around your neck.
- **FM systems:** FM is like a radio station that can transmit a signal a distance of approximately 50 feet. The person you are listening to wears a microphone and you have a receiver on your hearing aid that picks up this signal. It allows you to hear as though the person talking is about 6 inches from your hearing aid.
- **Infra-red systems:** Infra-red systems are sensitive to light waves. Sound is picked up, turned into a light wave, sent to receiver where it is turned back to a sound wave and sent into your hearing aid. This system cannot be used outside and does not travel from room to room like the FM signal does. It is most frequently used with TV's.

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- Roger: This is the most recent technology and is similar to the FM system except that it uses digital technology and is more sophisticated in terms of what it can do to sound.
- Loop systems: Loops generate an electromagnetic signal that your hearing aid can pick up when it is in the T position. This is a very old technology but is making a comeback. There are banks, drugstores, recreation centers, and hearing clinics in greater Victoria that have loop systems in them.

Note: For a listing of the offices, buildings, and churches in the Greater Victoria area that have some sort of listening assistance in them, go to the IDHHC website (idhhc.ca) and look under “Links”.

Aural Rehabilitation

There are other strategies beyond hearing aids and assistive technology that you should be aware of and may want to investigate. These can be very beneficial as a supplement to what you hear through your hearing aids.

- Speech reading: This is using all available information, body language, facial expressions, lip movements and context to help you understand what is being said.
- Auditory training: This involves developing your auditory skills to utilize your hearing aid to its maximum and give you practice listening in difficult listening situations.
- Listening skills: Good and active listening is so important when you have a hearing loss. You should know what is involved in listening and try and use active listening strategies as much as possible.
- Repair strategies: In conversations often things start to break down. There are strategies you can use to get the conversation back on track again.

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- Environmental changes: There are adjustments you can make in your office, home, meetings, family gatherings that will help you hear optimally. Get to know these and use them when appropriate.