

# HEARING AID BUYERS COMPANION

for the Empowered Australian

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**Your Guide to Finding Your Best Hearing  
Solution in a Complex and Confusing Industry**

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previously published as  
**REVISED**  
and  
**UPDATED**  
Hearing Aid Buyers Guide

**Christo Fourie, Clinical Audiologist**

# Hearing Aid Buyers Companion for the Empowered Australian

Your guide to finding your best hearing solution  
in a complex and confusing industry

by  
Christo Fourie  
Clinical Audiologist

*Hearing Aid Buyers Companion for the Empowered Australian:  
Your guide to finding your best hearing solution in a complex and confusing industry*

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[www.valuehearing.com.au](http://www.valuehearing.com.au)  
Ph: 1800 157 429

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# Foreword

by Christo Fourie

*B.Communication Pathology (RSA, Pretoria). MAudA (CCP)  
(Audiologist)*

**P**urchasing hearing aids can be an unnecessarily confusing and frustrating process. No one actually *WANTS* hearing aids. What you *REALLY* want is the feeling of confidence when you speak to strangers. Or the positive emotions it brings you, like clearly hearing a grandchild's voice or being able to engage socially with friends.

You want a satisfactory long-term outcome, something that improves your hearing with the least amount of hassles, not just a product. Something that you are comfortable with and that works when you need it to work.

Untreated hearing loss has been linked to depression, anxiety, reduced income potential, social isolation, and more.

More recently, untreated hearing loss has been linked to a significantly increased risk of dementia and general cognitive decline.

Research out of Melbourne has shown that optimally fitted hearing aids appear to reverse cognitive deterioration, not just slow it down as they initially hypothesised.

This benefit appears to be directly linked to the amount of hearing aid use (hours used per day). So, getting the right hearing solution – one that you are willing to wear and delivers optimal results – is critical to your cognitive and emotional health.

A hearing aid will have to last and work for you for around 5 years on average, so you don't want to make the expensive mistake of getting something that does not work well.

Getting to the point where hearing aids deliver on the promise of allowing you to re-engage with the sounds and people you want can be a perilous journey. This is because whenever there is money to be made, wolves in sheep's clothing make their appearance.

Sometimes you are lucky in finding the right provider and right solution to achieve this, but oftentimes not (if the hundreds of client stories I have heard over the years are anything to go by).

When there is so much information out there, it is hard to know where to begin or who to trust.

What's worse is that each person with hearing loss is uniquely different, so you cannot even rely on what has worked for others (I apologise if that was a strategy you had in mind).

This guide is designed to take LUCK out of the equation as much as possible and give you the best chance possible of finding a solution that will work for your unique situation, using facts, measurable evidence, and experienced professional opinion.





Mark White, a client of ours in Perth, explains his experience prior to finding us:

**“It can be a very daunting experience to go through the process of trying to select the right ones.**

**I can honestly tell you I was very reluctant to get hearing aids and held back for several years and guess I’m not the only one out there to do so.**

**During this time, I went to several Audiologist Clinics to get my hearing checked thinking it may not be that bad and do I really need them. Unfortunately, I came out of each one not feeling that confident at all and wondering if the hearing aids recommended for me were really the right ones I needed.**

I have worked as an Audiologist in the Australian hearing aid industry since 2001 for a variety of retailers, big and small, independent and not. During this time, I have seen and heard it all.

I started out quite naively thinking that, like myself, anyone involved in the industry would be dedicated to delivering the best for their clients, while continually working on professional development and finding ways to improve client outcomes. Unfortunately, I was mistaken. More on this later.

In 2009 I decided to go it on my own, as I noticed that there was a mismatch between what was promised and what was delivered. I developed a way of serving my clients that would change things for the better.

This is when things started getting really interesting.

I quickly found competitors and even suppliers trying to strangle my then fledgling business. For them, it was all about the money. I fought, persevered, and, in the process, I believe opened the market to much more healthy competition. Hence today you can see lower prices more readily available today than in 2009.

While doing this, I refined the traditional hearing aid provision model to improve all aspects of service provision and truly deliver on the name of my business, Value Hearing. This book is not intended to promote Value Hearing. But if you are interested, you can read the Value Hearing Story here: <https://bit.ly/3g5A0lv>

## Purpose of this Guide

This guide has been written to share what I have learned with the Australian public and to help you quickly navigate an evermore confusing journey to better hearing.

My purpose is to empower you to succeed in your search for better health, improved engagement and higher levels of confidence through better hearing.

Whether you are a new user exploring hearing aids for the first time, or an existing user looking to upgrade your hearing aids to something better, there is something in here for everyone.

I understand that I cannot personally help every person with hearing loss find their best solution, one which will deliver optimal results over the long term.

As such, I have designed this guide to take all the best practices, combined with my insights into the internal workings of the industry, and make them available to you. With this, you stand a much better chance of finding your optimal solution quickly, while hopefully avoiding all of the hidden pitfalls.

I will be as objective as possible in what follows. I certainly don’t mind being controversial and open when it is required.

We are also constantly adding [new educational articles](#) to our website as well as videos and reviews to [our YouTube channel](#), so be sure to subscribe to keep up to with the latest information.

## How to use this book

This book is designed as a step-by-step guide to helping you find your ideal hearing solution quickly.

I define an ideal solution as the simplest solution which will address your hearing loss effectively, without you having to overspend on unnecessary features or those which are highly unlikely to benefit you.

An ideal solution, including associated services, should continue delivering improved hearing, with the quality of life and health benefits associated with better hearing, not only during the honeymoon period, but also for years to come.

An ideal solution does not just consist of a specific hearing aid model. Optimal outcome can only be achieved by the cooperation of a skilled and caring hearing health professional. Any hearing aid is only as good as the skills of the clinician fitting it to you, and the services and recalls offered to ensure the benefit is ongoing.

For those exploring hearing aid options for the first time, I recommend reading this guide from start to finish.

For those looking to find a new provider or considering whether to upgrade their existing hearing aids, you can use the index of this book to find only those areas of interest to you.

Throughout this guide you will see links as [underlined blue text](#). If you are reading the guide as a PDF onscreen, clicking or tapping on these links will take you to a blog article that explains a concept in more detail. If you have printed out the PDF, we have also included handy QR codes in the back of the book. Simply point your smartphone camera at these codes to open the website on your phone. These articles are also regularly updated with the latest information.

You are always welcome to sign-up to my newsletter, where I publish all my latest articles if you wish to [stay on top of developments](#). I have also added a section at the end of the guide which lists other articles you may find helpful in your journey to better hearing. Don't forget to subscribe to [our YouTube channel](#) to get the latest hearing aid reviews and other information in video format.

I wish you safe and happy travels!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christo Fourie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## 2

# Introduction

# Introduction

It has been reported by the media that in Australia that your chances of giving up on your hearing aids within the first year or so of purchasing them is around 33% (figures do vary).

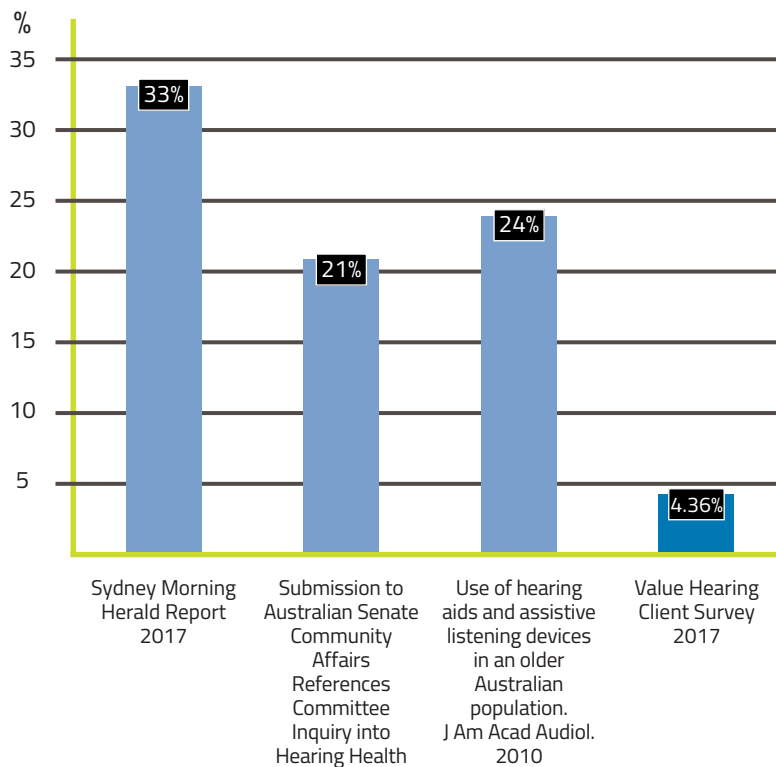
This is a shocking statistic and certainly does not instill much confidence in hearing aids or the industry. This is especially true considering what hearing aids can cost.

Fortunately, this is just the average. By following this guide, you can increase your chances of success dramatically, shifting from a reliance on pure luck to taking control of your hearing health in an informed manner.

I have done in-house research on thousands of clients in my own company, Value Hearing, to see how our processes compare.

We found that our non-use rate as measured over eight (8) years is only 4.36% and steadily improving. That is despite considering 'non-use' for our purposes at less than 2 hours a day usage. (Remember: Research indicates that the more you use your hearing aids, the better it is for your cognitive health)

**Percentage of Hearing Aid Users Who Stop Wearing Them**



This has been achieved by having a very clear client journey in place.

This client journey involves specific processes combined with active recalls to ensure our clients receive not only immediate benefit, but ongoing benefit over the life of the instrument.

You can read more about Value Hearing's Client Journey and download a copy if you are interested.

You can compare our journey to the journey of the company you choose to work with. This alone might increase your chances of success.



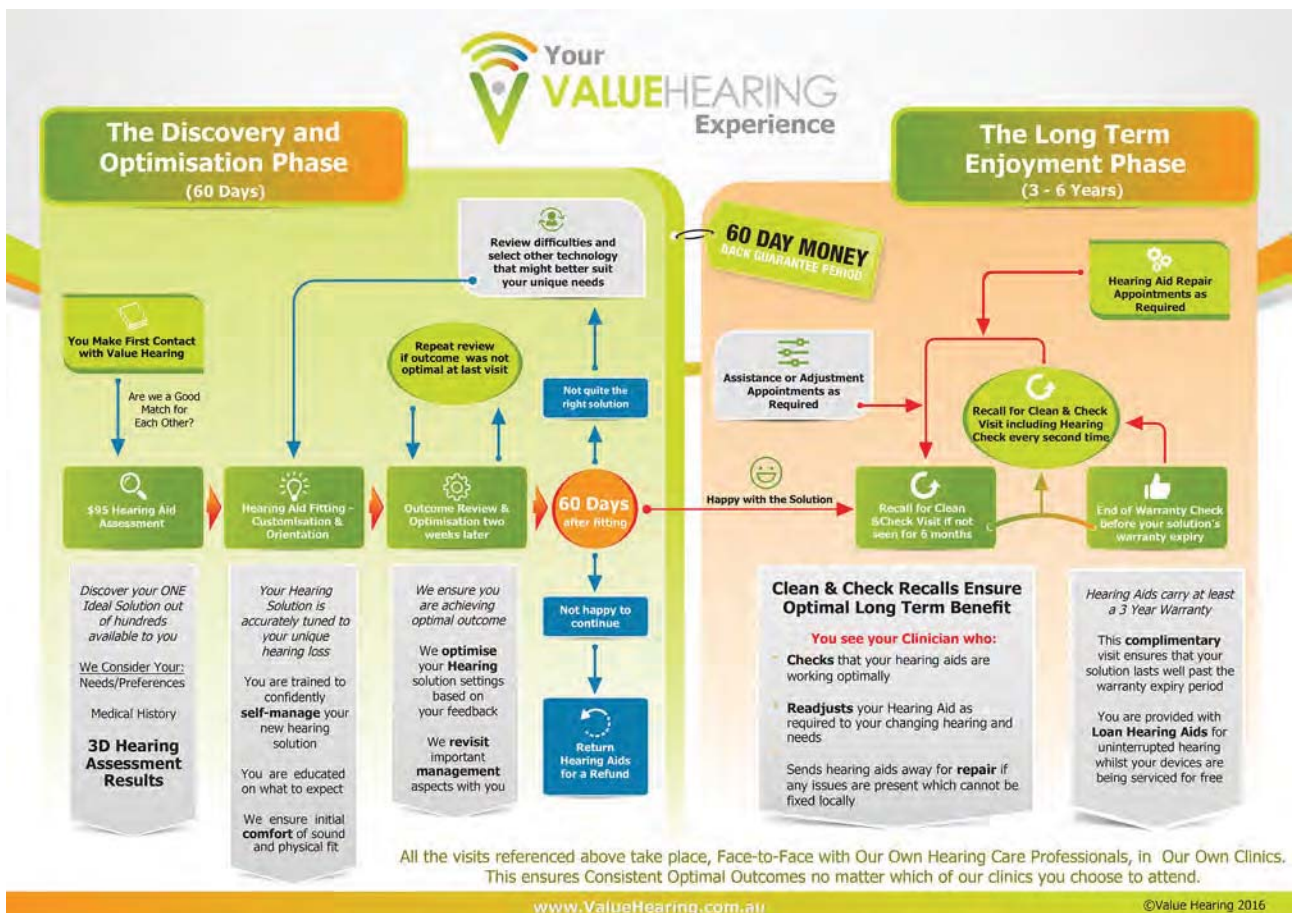
✓ Buyer's Tip

JUST BECAUSE A COMPANY IS LARGE DOES NOT MEAN IT HAS A CLEARLY DEFINED CLIENT JOURNEY. ASK TO SEE THEIR CLIENT JOURNEY PLAN.

This guide is intended to help you, the Australian hearing aid buyer, obtain your best value solution, capable of delivering optimal benefit and outcomes immediately, and over the long term.

The book contains very important and logical steps to guide you through this process, from determining whether you are ready for hearing devices all the way through to getting your devices fitted and followed-up to your satisfaction.

You might also find our [free 6 Step Checklist to discovering your ideal hearing solution](#) helpful. It summarises all the key points in this book into a short checklist to guide you through the steps.



Feel free to download our  
Six Step Checklist to Discovering Your Ideal Hearing Solution

The image displays six pages from a checklist titled "Your 6 Step Checklist to Discovering Your Ideal Hearing Solution".

- Page 1:** "1. Preparing to buy hearing aids". Includes a list of 5 questions to ask a hearing clinic before an appointment.
- Page 2:** "2. Questions to ask when making an appointment". Contains three columns of questions regarding appointment types, duration, and clinic details.
- Page 3:** "3. What the hearing test should entail". Features three columns of questions about the hearing specialist's qualifications and the test procedure.
- Page 4:** "4. How much information should you expect?". Includes three columns of questions about the information provided by the hearing clinic.
- Page 5:** "5. What should you expect from the audiologist's recommendations?". Contains three columns of questions about the audiologist's advice and recommendations.
- Page 6:** "6. Hearing aid fitting appointment". Includes questions about the fitting process and the specialist's role.

Each page includes the VALUHEARING logo, a "Your 6 Step Checklist" header, and a "Notes" section at the bottom. The pages are designed to be filled out by a consumer to gather information from potential hearing clinics.

## 3

# How You Can Tell If You Have Hearing Loss

## How You Can Tell If You Have Hearing Loss

**B**efore we get into the world of audiology and hearing aids, let's begin at the beginning and start with the most obvious question: do you have hearing loss? It might be difficult to tell. Without testing, there is no definitive way to be sure. However, there are clues that tell you not all is right with your hearing.

Let's look at some of these.

### ***Do you have tinnitus?***

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Tinnitus refers to any intermittent or continuous noises (hissing or buzzing for examples), or ringing in one ear (or both), or in the head, and experienced by a person in the absence of external noise.

Tinnitus is usually a symptom of problems in the hearing system (outer, middle, or inner ears). Tinnitus as a symptom of sensorineural hearing loss means that there is some damage to the hair cells of the inner ear, and it can often be experienced before a hearing loss is detected. We have a complete guide to managing your tinnitus online: <https://www.valuehearing.com.au/ultimate-guide-to-tinnitus>

### ***Do you have difficulties hearing and following conversations in noisy environments?***

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Hearing speech in the presence of background noise tends to be the most commonly reported difficulty for people with hearing loss, and it is often the main complaint from people with slight or mild hearing problems.

High frequency hearing loss (loss of high-pitched sounds in hearing) is quite common, and it is the high-pitched sounds of speech that give us cues to hear speech clearly. Once background noise is added to the mixture, hearing someone clearly can be made exponentially more difficult if you have even a slight hearing loss.

Do you have difficulties hearing softly spoken people, whispers, or sounds/speech from a distance?

As with the above point, the clarity of speech comes from hearing the high-pitched sounds. If you have a hearing loss, it is common to miss out on these important cues, so people can sound like they're mumbling.

### ***Do you have difficulties hearing women's or children's voices?***

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The high-pitched sounds are often the first to deteriorate as we age, so hearing and understanding what women with higher-pitched voices or children can be difficult.

### ***Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?***

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If you can't hear someone clearly, you will find yourself saying 'what?' or 'huh?,' and generally asking for someone to repeat themselves. Even people with hearing in the normal range will sometimes require someone to repeat themselves, but, if you have hearing problems, you will find yourself asking for repeats more often. Our family and friends will quite often





be the first to notice this as well, and might become annoyed at having to constantly repeat themselves.

### ***Do you often find you've misunderstood a conversation and/or responded inappropriately?***

---

Our brains quite often try to work harder to help us understand what we might not have heard by filling in the blanks.

However, it doesn't always get this right. Missing the clarity of words might mean that some words, such as 'feet', 'heat', and 'seat' for example, might sound the same to you. If you've misunderstood what someone has said because you haven't heard them clearly, you might think the conversation is about something else entirely and respond inappropriately.

### ***Do you find yourself straining to hear conversations and feel more tired after doing so?***

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When hearing loss starts to occur, your brain tries to help you compensate by utilising other cues such as visual cues or contextual cues to help you follow a conversation. This often means that you're consciously or subconsciously working harder to follow and understand conversations, which can be exhausting after a while.

### ***Do you have difficulties following a conversation if two or more people are talking at the same time?***

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Once again, your brain is working harder to try to follow a conversation, but if there are competing sounds such as background noise or multiple conversations, it can be very difficult to ignore some of those sounds.

### ***Do you get complaints that the television is turned up too loud?***

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This is a common complaint from family members of people with hearing difficulties. You might even find that increasing the television volume makes the sound louder, but not necessarily any clearer and easier to understand.

### ***Do you have difficulties hearing someone over the telephone?***

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Different people speak differently over the phone, so it can sometimes be more difficult to understand someone over the telephone. But if you're finding that this is becoming increasingly worse for you, you may have a hearing problem. When we use the telephone, we're relying solely on our hearing as there are no visual cues to help us out.

*Please note that the above material is for general information only – if you answered yes to 2 or more of the above points, you may wish to consult a hearing specialist to have your hearing checked to confirm if you have a hearing problem, and for advice regarding your options.*

*You could also use an online hearing check like this one if you do not wish to approach a clinic just yet: [bit.ly/329qq8u](https://bit.ly/329qq8u) Nothing beats an in-clinic test, however, because a skilled clinician will be able to pick up medical issues that may contribute to your hearing difficulties.*



## Reasons Why You Cannot Hear in Noise with Hearing Loss

Difficulty hearing and understanding speech in noise is one of the early [symptoms of hearing loss](#). It also tends to be one of the more annoying parts of hearing loss as it can cause quite a bit of frustration and embarrassment.

When I asked one client why she chose to see us for her first test, she said: “It’s because I had a very embarrassing moment this week.”

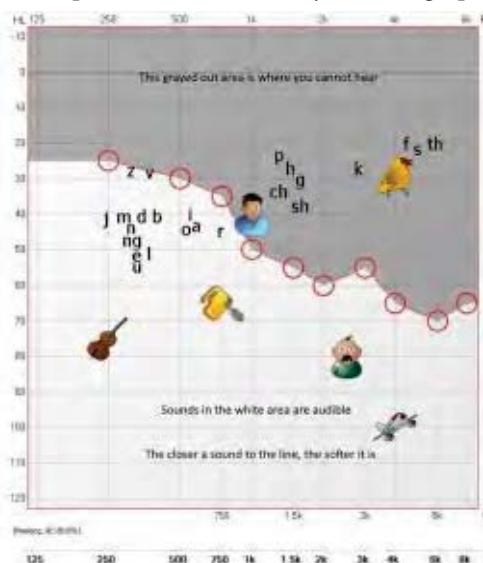
She went on to explain that she had met up with a group of friends who she had not seen for a while. They chose a busy little cafe for the meet-up. As they were chatting, she was having quite a bit of difficulty hearing. One friend said something she did not hear clearly. As a way of compensating, rather than asking her to repeat what was said, she simply replied: “That’s nice”. After the meeting, another friend called her aside and asked her why she had said ‘That’s nice’, when she was just told that a friend’s mother had died. She made an appointment for a hearing test that same day.

On the lighter side of things, another gentleman once told me he ended up with a new hair colour when he attended the barber. He was unable to clearly hear the barber over the sound of the hair clippers. When the barber asked ‘something’, he replied: “Sure”. Suddenly, to his utmost surprise, the barber proceeded to colour his hair!

### The Shape of Your Hearing Loss

The most common type of hearing loss is called sensorineural hearing loss, also called nerve deafness, or permanent hearing loss. It affects little hair cells inside the inner ear. Initially, this affects our ability to pick up the soft parts of speech, most commonly in the high pitch range. This makes speech less clear even though the volume of speech, which is perceived in the low pitch range, might still be normal or at least better than the high pitch hearing.

At right is an example of a high-pitched hearing loss in the right ear. The grayed-out area is the area where the client cannot hear anything. The white area contains the levels and sounds where this client can hear. As you can see all the vowels are audible. They convey volume. The consonants are inaudible. They convey clarity. So, this client may feel that speech is loud enough and he can cope, so long as the speaker looks at him whilst speaking, as he gets the missing sounds by ‘reading’ their lips.



### Do you ever feel you would hear better if only people just looked at you whilst speaking?

The problem with most background noise is that it tends to be dominant in the low pitches. This then drowns out the better part of your hearing making it very hard to understand in noise, as lip reading – which all of us with good vision do naturally – may only give you about 40% understanding of the speech.

### How Well is Your Brain Able to Understand Speech in Noise?

If this is the only reason why someone with hearing loss cannot hear in noise, then it should be an easy ‘fix’ by simply boosting the sounds the person cannot hear.

If this was true, then everyone wearing even the most basic hearing instruments should do marvelously well with them as they boost soft sounds more than they do moderate or loud sounds. They can shape the sound to improve hearing in the areas where you need more



help. If professionally fitted, hearing aids can also reduce loud sounds, so they don't cause even more hearing loss.

## So Why Do Some People Do Well with Hearing Aids in Noise and Not Others?

The reason for this is that the ear is simply a microphone to the brain. The brain is where hearing and, in particular, understanding of speech actually takes place.

Hearing aids correct for the ear damage on the outside before sending the corrected sound into the ear. This sound needs to travel through the 'microphone' of the damaged ear to be sent for interpretation by the brain.

### Two potential factors could be at play here:

- The damage in the ear might cause distortion, so the brain does not receive a clear enough sound to be able to understand.
- The brain itself may have trouble separating speech from noise. So even if the signal is clear, but not quite "clean" enough, the brain cannot make sense of the speech.

One or even both factors could be present in any individual along with hearing loss.

### Either way, each person's brain is different when it comes to understanding speech in noise.

Some people simply need a 'boost' - like a graphic equaliser - in the sound they miss in order to hear really well. Others need the hearing aid to clean up the signal before their brain is able to understand speech in noise. Other less fortunate people simply cannot hear well in noise, no matter how much the hearing aid tries to clean up the noise. They might require extra help through specialised accessories to stand a chance of coping in noisy situations.

The extent to which each person's ability to hear in noise differs can be easily measured. The problem is that this individual ability is often not measured during standard testing.

Instead, it is just assumed that everyone has average difficulty to hear in noise. This leads to hearing aids being selected based on the assumption that you are 'average'.

Commonly, you are offered a selection of hearing aids based on your lifestyle, activity level, and age. Hearing aids are priced based on the features they have. More expensive hearing aids have lots of features, but can also separate speech from noise better.

Without taking your individual hearing ability to hear in noise into account, the clinician can only base their prescription on your lifestyle, age, and activity levels. If you have a busier lifestyle, you will need to pay more for a suitable hearing aid. If you have a less active lifestyle, you might be offered a less expensive hearing aid.

Ironically, this industry standard method of hearing aid selection leads only to average outcomes. So, it is no surprise that many people complain about their hearing aids. Some studies have shown that on average there is no difference between the performance of basic hearing aids over premium hearing aids.

I believe the reason for this is that the current hearing aid selection process assumes average hearing in noise. So average recommendations deliver average performance in noise.

### Are you simply average?



## Some Theoretical Examples

Let's look at a few scenarios with a few fictitious people with hearing loss, and compare the industry standard hearing aid selection process to an alternative: the individualised evidence based selection process.

**John:**



### **Industry Standard Process - Assuming Average:**

John has a very active lifestyle. He frequents restaurants, has an active social life, and does occasional consulting work. He attends a hearing test and mentions that his biggest trouble is hearing speech clearly in noise. He is diagnosed with moderate high frequency hearing loss. Due to his active lifestyle, he is recommended the most expensive hearing aids as this is what the manufacturer's lifestyle chart suggests. He is very happy with the hearing aids and recommends them to all his friends. He warns them, however, that hearing aids are very expensive, but it is worth it going for the best you can afford.

### **Evidence-Based Process - Measuring His Unique Hearing Ability in Noise**

John does very well in the speech-in-noise test. In fact, his hearing ability in noise is almost normal once the hearing loss itself has been corrected for. He is recommended basic hearing aids, which cost only a quarter of the price of the expensive hearing aids under the previous method. He is very happy with the hearing aids and tells all his friends. He tells them that hearing aids cost a lot less than he expected.

**Sue:**



### **Industry Standard Process - Assuming Average:**

Sue is nowhere near as active as John. She stays mainly at home, likes watching TV, attends church, and catches up with her family in a small group at home once a week. She is diagnosed with a similar hearing loss configuration to John. Due to her more limited lifestyle, she is recommended middle of the range hearing aids. She is terribly unhappy with the hearing

aids as she cannot hear her family when they get together; nor can she engage in the after-church discussions. The TV is not very clear when watching movies, and she still needs to revert to subtitles.

The clinician counsels her that she needs to allow time to get used to them or pay more for a 'better hearing aid'. She tries a better hearing aid, does a little better, but is still not quite happy. In order to not disappoint the clinician who has worked so hard to try to help her, she keeps the hearing aids, hoping things will improve in due course. Over time, she wears the hearing aids less and less until she eventually gives up on them completely. She tells anyone willing to listen that [hearing aids do not work](#).

### **Evidence-Based Process - Measuring Her Unique Hearing Ability in Noise**

When tested after the contribution of her hearing loss has been accounted for, Sue is found to have severe difficulty hearing in noise. She is recommended a pair of top-end hearing aids, but is also advised that she might need an FM system to help her hear her family when they get together. Sue understands what to realistically expect and is delighted when the recommended solution improves her hearing significantly within the limitations that the clinician discussed with her. She continues using her hearing aids for years to come and [recommends her friends also have their hearing checked](#).

**Mary:**



### **Industry Standard Process - Assuming Average:**

Mary is tested and found to have a hearing loss quite similar to that of Sue and John. She has a similar lifestyle to Sue and is recommended a similar level of hearing aid to what Sue was offered initially. She is reasonably happy and continues wearing the aids. She is a little disappointed that they do not work as well as she hoped in noise, but, overall, they seem okay.

### **Evidence-Based Process - Measuring Her Unique Hearing Ability in Noise**

Mary is found to have moderate difficulty hearing in noise once the influence of her hearing loss has been taken into account. She is recommended a hearing aid that is a little bit more capable of improving speech in noise than the ones she would have been recommended just based on her lifestyle. She is delighted with its performance in most situations. Her confidence in her hearing improves drastically, and she joins a social group as she can now partake in noisier conversations than before. She is happy to recommend hearing aids to anyone.

## ***Why is the Industry Standard Still Based on Lifestyle Charts When Better Options Exist?***

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### **Clinical Processes are Slow to Change**

Clinicians are often trained as scientists. As such, they tend to be wary of change and can be guilty of thinking ‘if it isn’t broken, then why fix it?’. New assessment techniques and equipment typically take a decade or two before it becomes standard throughout the medical industry. The Industry Standard Hearing Aid Selection method is well entrenched in everyday clinical work, so it is a tough nut to crack.

### **Clinic Profitability**

The unfortunate ‘truth’ is that there is generally relatively higher profit to be made off top-end hearing aids in retail (and wholesale) than there is from more basic hearing aids. Similarly, some clinics pay commissions or profit share to clinicians, which drives the sales of more profitable hearing solutions over less profitable models. As such, speech in noise testing is not often part of the clinical process as it can, and regularly does, indicate a more basic hearing aid is required than suggested by the lifestyle chart.

Some clinics are now moving away from commission-based schemes, but without the correct processes being enforced, the client outcomes remain unchanged.

### **Lack of Available Tools**

Speech in noise testing is readily available. Unfortunately, not all testing equipment easily supports it. Even if the equipment was capable of performing speech in noise testing, the required module to be able to do the test is missing from many clinics’ equipment. So, if the clinician does not have easy access to this sort of test, it is a big ask for them to bring a process not supported by their employer into their already busy schedule.

### **Manufacturers Support the Standard Method**

The way manufacturers promote hearing aids and separate them into different levels is consistent with the lifestyle way of hearing aid selection. To compound this, there are many features in top-end hearing aids which ‘sound’ like good features, but have little evidence to support their efficacy. So, clinicians and hearing aid users alike may be easily misled by a lot of marketing claims.

There is no easily obtainable way to assign a specific hearing aid’s performance to a specific speech in noise score based on the information provided to the clinician. Unfortunately for the manufacturer, the profit margins are also larger on more premium products.



## ***How Do I Get Access to Product Matched Speech in Noise Testing?***

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I had to develop my own method over time, combined with careful study of any information available about a specific hearing aid, to find our unique matching criteria.

We adjust the criteria as real-life usage data is collected to ensure outcomes are realistic and consistent. We have been refining and improving this process since 2009.

My clinicians have access to these figures via our in-house-developed unique quote system.

It captures your unique speech in noise performance score and delivers a star rating out of 5 (5 being the best) for any



hearing aid the clinician may choose to suggest, relative to your tested performance in noise. Only then do we take lifestyle, age, and activity level into account.

**At the time of writing, I am not aware of any other clinic that does sort of precise matching anywhere else in the world.**

The benefits to you of this evidence-based method are:

- You never pay more than you absolutely need to in order to get optimal benefit
- You are unlikely to be recommended a hearing aid that will not perform as intended
- You require less back and forth and research time in order to end up with your best option
- You can be confident in your choice as we can guarantee your success
- You will know beforehand if your hearing in noise requirements are beyond what technology can offer. We can then help you in other ways. This avoids disappointment and rejection of hearing solutions
- You are much less likely to give up on your hearing solution due to lack of performance, and
- Hearing aid usage time increases, which may increase cognitive benefits.

Clinicians also benefit:

- They can be much more confident in the recommendations they make to you
- They can work ethically, prescribing what you need without over prescribing
- They get to work with happier clients, who have realistic expectations around their hearing aids
- They never have to worry about commissions when making recommendations, they simply use the available facts, and
- They are much more likely to recommend a solution that will keep their client satisfied for years to come.

*Note: This particular type of speech in noise testing can only be conducted on clients with a good 'handle' on English, as English speech material is used. It differs from normal speech testing using single words with or without white noise, which is common. Speech in noise testing involves you repeating sentences in the presence of background party-like speech babble.*

## 4

# How Do You Know If You Need Hearing Aids?



## How Do You Know If You Need Hearing Aids?

For most people, hearing problems develop gradually, usually over a period of years. Due to its slow rate of deterioration, it can be difficult to recognise the signs of hearing loss when they first appear. It's often the family and friends closest to you who become frustrated about your hearing; after all, you can't miss what you can't hear.

### *How we hear*

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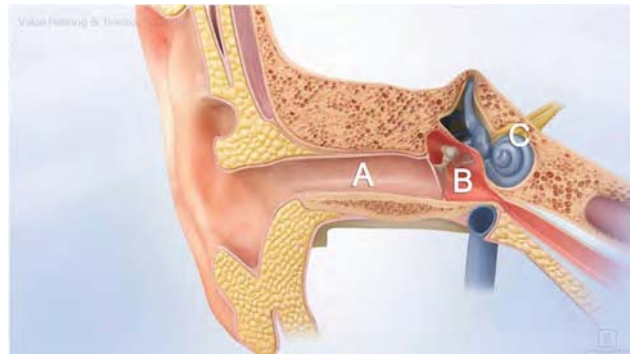
Before you can understand hearing loss, we need to understand a little about how we hear.

The ear is divided into 3 (three) sections – the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear.

The outer ear consists of the ear canal and eardrum. Sounds travelling down the ear canal need to make it up to the eardrum, which causes it to vibrate and send these sounds through to the middle ear.

The middle ear contains a chain of three small bones that connect the eardrum through to the opening to the inner ear. When the eardrum vibrates, the three bones continue to send the series of vibrations through to the inner ear, which is filled with fluid.

The inner ear contains the permanent hearing organ, called the cochlea. The vibrations from the middle ear causes the inner ear fluid to move, which causes the hair cells lining the inside of the cochlea to move. This movement sends an electrical impulse up the hearing nerve to the brain for the sounds to be processed.



*The working parts of the ear*

Therefore, hearing is about how the three sections of the ear work together to transmit sounds, and how the brain works to process those sounds.

Hearing loss can occur when there is a breakdown in how these sounds are transmitted. Permanent, or sensorineural, hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the hair cells in the cochlea of the inner ear.

### *Hearing vs Listening*

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*Hearing* is access to acoustic information.

*Listening*, however, requires attention and intention.

Normal hearing alone does not assure that one is a good listener. We all know people who have normal hearing but are lousy listeners. Conversely, many of our patients have impaired hearing, yet are wonderful listeners. Listening is a skill that requires effort, and, for a person with a hearing loss, that effort must be particularly concentrated.

The ear basically acts like a microphone to the brain. The brain is where listening actually takes place. This is likely one of the reasons why a lack of hearing, resulting in a lack of stimulation to certain parts of the brain, could increase the risk of dementia and general cognitive decline.

You don't actually 'hear' a sound until the brain's hearing centres receive electrical signals from the ear, process those signals, and generate some reaction – like getting out of the way of an oncoming car as you cross the street.

“We hear with our brains, not with our ears.”

Did you know that not only do the hearing nerves weaken over time, but also the hearing centres of the brain tend to weaken as a result of auditory deprivation?

In other words, by depriving the hearing-impaired ear of adequate stimulation, there is a likelihood that the brain's hearing centres become lazy and change the brain's ability to correctly process speech. The brain, like any other part of your body, wants to conserve energy, so neural pathways that aren't used get disconnected.

**As advanced as hearing aid technology has become, hearing aids alone cannot produce the listening skills or comprehension needed for communication. Hearing aids are designed to provide access to as much acoustic information as possible, but they do not directly modify the user's behaviours.**

In essence, introducing sound to an auditory system that has been deprived of sound is likely to alter the way in which sounds are perceived and represented by the ear.

The brain will rewire to get more information from another sense when it is missing from one sense.

Studies have shown that even with mild hearing loss, the brain rewires to make more use of the eyes to aid with lipreading. The connection to the hearing part of the brain weakens when this happens.

This means that the speed of processing slows down because the information has to travel much further to interpret than before. It also means that you may have problems hearing someone if they aren't looking at you. In clinic, speech in quiet testing using single out of context words can give us clues as to how far your brain has deteriorated.

### ***One hearing aid or two?***

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Another potential cause of auditory deprivation is single-ear hearing aid use.

This asymmetrical setup can cause one ear to take on more of the listening activity than the other, thereby weakening the unaided ear over time.

You may have saved a few dollars by purchasing a single hearing aid rather than a pair, but you are depriving one ear of sound and causing the nerves on that ear to slowly weaken.

*Bottom line?* Over time, that unaided ear is going to lose more and more functionality. When you finally do get around to buying a pair of hearing aids or adding a second hearing aid, that unaided ear will have a harder time adapting to sound or may even not adapt at all.

And get this – the recovery of the hearing centres of the brain also weaken slowly over time.

*Why?* Well, when the hearing nerves and the areas of the brain responsible for hearing are deprived of sound, they atrophy – weaken – making recovery from hearing loss through mechanical means, aka: a hearing aid, that much more difficult. The fancy term used by hearing professionals is auditory deprivation.

Starting to get the picture?

The key to hearing better for longer is to keep the hearing part of the brain active and NOT let it atrophy. Through the use of hearing aids – early, when you first notice hearing loss – you'll enjoy a better quality of hearing longer.

**Note: It is not your hearing loss that will get greater without hearing aids as some clinicians claim. It is your ability to understand speech that might get worse instead.**

✓ Buyer's Tip

YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN RECOMMENDED A HEARING AID THAT WILL NOT ONLY WORK WELL FOR YOU IN QUIET, BUT ALSO IN NOISE. PEOPLE WHO DO NOT FIND BENEFIT IN NOISE TEND TO REMOVE THEM IN THESE SITUATIONS INITIALLY AND END UP LATER NOT WEARING THEM AT ALL. SO, IT IS CRITICAL FOR YOUR BRAIN AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH THAT YOU FIND THE RIGHT HEARING AID.

# 5

## Preparing to Buy Hearing Aids

## Preparing to Buy Hearing Aids

### *Are you motivated to proceed?*

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The motivation behind why you are seeking to purchase hearing aids needs to be carefully considered before making this investment.

#### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**ENSURING YOU HAVE THE CORRECT MOTIVATION WILL BE A DETERMINING FACTOR IN YOUR LONG-TERM SUCCESS WITH HEARING AIDS.**

You need to be sure that you are getting hearing devices because you are choosing to improve your communication, quality of life, and brain health.

**When this is a personal decision, you are more likely to wear your hearing aids correctly, ensuring that you adapt to them effortlessly.**

Sadly, people who get hearing aids solely to please their partner or family, or due to some other outside influence are more likely to stop wearing them over time or find excuses as to why the hearing aids don't work.

Hearing aids offer many benefits such as:

- Reduced risk of cognitive decline (hearing aids work more on the brain than the ears)
- Improved cognitive function according to research from Melbourne
- Improved communication in social environments
- Higher subjective energy levels for the wearer
- Improved confidence
- Better social interactions
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Reduction of depression due to the isolation caused by hearing problems
- Reduction of central (brain) changes due to hearing difficulties, and
- Even higher income potential for the hearing aid wearer compared to people with untreated hearing problems.



It is imperative to take ALL these factors into account when determining your true motivation to improve your hearing.

### ***What are your hearing needs?***

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An important factor in selecting a suitable hearing device is matching the hearing aid features to your specific hearing needs. Having an overview of your lifestyle will help the hearing professional to determine your hearing needs. They can then combine this with the information obtained during a comprehensive hearing assessment, including speech in noise testing, to determine your ideal solution.

I highly recommend writing down **the four or five most important situations** where you find hearing to be most difficult, frustrating, isolating, embarrassing, or limiting. Don't assume the clinician understands your lifestyle. Consider everything carefully.

Bring this list to your appointment to help your specialist get a good understanding of your situation.

The hearing specialist should review this list with you and ask you some more in-depth questions in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of your lifestyle, such as:

- What you spend your time doing?
- What is your home environment like? (Number of people, acoustics etc.)
- Who you talk to (is it mostly to people one-on-one, in small groups, in large venues)?
- What situations are most challenging?
- How important is it that you hear in certain situations? and
- How often do you find yourself in these situations?

**The case history questions you will be asked regarding your lifestyle can be some of the most valuable time spent during the initial assessment appointment.**

**If the hearing specialist doesn't understand your hearing situation well enough, then they won't have all the information required to recommend the best device to meet your needs.**





## 6

# Choosing A Hearing Care Professional

or

Finding Someone Who Can Truly Help *You*  
Rather Than Themselves

## Choosing A Hearing Care Professional

**W**hen you are getting your hearing tested you should be dealing with one of two hearing professionals - audiologists or audiometrists. **Audiologists** are **university graduates** with **postgraduate qualifications in Audiology** (usually a Masters degree) or equivalent training.

A minimum of twelve months of supervised clinical practice in Audiology is also required.

Audiologists have broad responsibilities and expertise in all non-medical areas of hearing services, including complex hearing assessment, tinnitus management, and rehabilitation of hearing impairment as well as hearing instrument prescription, fitting and management.

**Audiometrists** are required to have completed a **minimum Diploma in Audiometry** (TAFE) and have received in-house training from the hearing aid industry. They are required to have a minimum of three years of on-the-job experience in hearing assessment, hearing instrument prescription and fitting, and management of hearing problems. I have personally met great audiologists and great audiometrists. Similarly, there are less capable clinicians in both groups as well.



### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**WHEN CONTACTING A HEARING CLINIC, FEEL FREE TO ASK HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE THE SPECIALIST HAS.**

To find the best hearing care professional for you, there are a few factors you need to consider. This is especially important if you are considering getting hearing aids. Hearing aids aren't a 'one off, set-and-forget purchase' like some believe them to be.

A hearing aid is simply one step in a life-long hearing rehabilitation process. This means you will be spending a lot of time over several years with your hearing care professional. If you choose incorrectly, then those could be extremely frustrating years or could force you to look elsewhere.

Much of what I discuss in this chapter also relates to audiometrists, so do not dismiss a clinician simply because they are not an audiologist.

To understand what to look for in a hearing specialist, you first need to understand what an audiologist really is.

### ***What is an audiologist?***

An audiologist can be described as a hearing specialist. Unlike an ear specialist (ENT surgeon), an audiologist is not normally medically trained, but is instead classified as an allied health professional.

Audiologists in Australia have at least a Master's degree in Audiology, or if they trained overseas like I did, they need to write and pass a comprehensive equivalency examination in order to register with a recognised professional body, such as Audiology Australia.

This registration allows them to register to provide services under the Federal Government's Office of Hearing Services' Hearing Services Program if they choose.

Commonly, provisional audiologists are free to work unsupervised as soon as three months post-graduation. Although training from Australian universities is excellent, there is no substitute for hours on the job. A minimum of one year unsupervised experience is ideal.

**Warning!**

**A PERSON DOES NOT ACTUALLY NEED TO BE ACCREDITED TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO SELF-FUNDED CLIENTS AS THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT REGULATION. SO, FEEL FREE TO ASK THE PRACTITIONER OR THE CLINIC FOR THEIR PROVIDER NUMBER OR PROFESSIONAL BODY REGISTRATION NUMBER FOR PROOF OF REGISTRATION.**

### ***Audiologists are not just trained in hearing aids***

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Their scope of practice is very wide and covers a range of skills including diagnostic hearing assessments, tinnitus management, balance assessments, newborn hearing screening and assessments, middle ear assessments, intra-operative hearing monitoring, hyperacusis specialist, cerumen removal, hearing loss prevention, hearing aid wholesale, cochlear implant assessments and mapping, clinical research, electrophysiological hearing assessments, hearing aid fittings, hearing rehabilitation, hearing therapy, paediatric hearing care – and more.

As you can see, an audiologist has a very wide range of knowledge and opportunities for clinical practice. The problem is it's highly unlikely they can be a master of all these areas of practice. Some clinical settings do require the clinician to be a jack-of-all-trades, but what you should really be looking for is a specialist in the area of importance to you.

Even then there are factors that would make one audiologist more suitable to your needs than another.

### ***Things to consider in a hearing specialist to help you with your hearing loss and hearing aids***

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The way the clinician practices, as well as their specialisation, are critically important factors to consider when choosing an audiologist to work with, which is likely to be a period that could potentially span over several years. You have to consider this selection process almost like an interview process.

I'll try and keep it as simple as possible.

### ***Where they work has a big impact***

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Hearing specialists can be found in a number of settings. These include working in hospitals, government organisations, hearing aid retail chains, big box stores, ear nose and throat specialist offices, medical clinics, schools, and in private practice to name a few.

Where they work dictates their speciality in many cases. They are also likely to be limited by the procedures and appointment times of the specific setting. Some settings even limit the kinds and brands of products they can recommend.

If you are looking for a hearing specialist to help you with hearing aids, there are a few common places you might find yourself looking, which I'll discuss in the next chapter.

I have personally worked in a few of these before going out on my own in 2009, so my opinions are based on personal experience. I also have clinicians working for me who have worked in these models previously, and they had much to share about their experiences.

The intention is not to write any workplace off, as there are always diamonds in the rough irrespective of where they work. Some of our best hearing specialists came from some of the least likely previous employers.

## 7

# Where To Find A Good Hearing Care Specialist

## Where To Find A Good Hearing Care Specialist

### ***Before we begin - why is it important to select a clinic carefully?***

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It is important to select the right hearing clinic as hearing aids are not a once-off purchase.

Hearing aids last around five years, but require regular maintenance and tuning to keep up with your ever-changing hearing levels and lifestyle needs.

So, you need to find a provider with whom you can build a long-term relationship.

Providers can have several clinicians working with them, but the clinic and their protocols are arguably more important than the specific clinician working for them at a specific time.

Check to see if the clinic has a documented client journey that they follow to ensure you will get the best long term care.

### ***Before we begin - look for value, not just at the price***

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Most areas usually have some type of hearing service available. These may take the form of a full-time permanent hearing clinic, or a visiting site where the hearing specialist visits on certain days.

Visiting sites may only have a hearing specialist there as little as one day a month, and there may be minimal on-site support for minor repairs, etc.

In some instances, it may be beneficial to travel to a major metropolitan area to get more competitive pricing on hearing devices, as rural clinics tend to have less competition and may charge accordingly.

You can then use the savings generated from buying your hearing aids from them towards visits at your local clinic for adjustments should you require ongoing support.

Often, you can still end up well ahead financially by doing this, rather than paying high local prices.

Also, there is also a movement towards remote support, where the clinician can adjust your hearing aids remotely through the internet. Just make sure to get the hearing aids set up in a face-to-face visit, as a good foundation is critical to your ongoing success.

**Remember that reasonable pricing is only one part of the value equation.**

### ***Before we begin - are you getting the best possible range?***

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Some hearing clinics offer a limited range of hearing aid manufacturers, and therefore don't offer their hearing care professionals, or their clients, true choice in getting the perfect hearing devices for their needs.

Your hearing aids ought to last you about five years, so make sure you at least have a chance of being offered the very best option for your needs out of all the models that are available today.

Where possible, choose an independent provider who offers many brands. There are many excellent hearing aid manufacturers in the Australian market, each with their own philosophies and unique technologies. Most can get you close to where you need to be with your hearing, but sometimes one model has distinct and additional benefits over another.



Further in this book I'll provide an overview of all the major brands in Australia.

Beware of clinics that seem to have brands, that, when googled on the web, seem to be linked only to that clinic. These are 'white labled' hearing aids from known manufacturers that have been intentionally rebranded to make shopping around almost impossible.

This limits your choice and forces you to accept what you are told. Trying to research these hearing aids usually ends up with you hitting a brick wall.

Whitelabeled hearing aids might be:

- Years out of date and based on old technology (With the advances in hearing aid technology, there are very clear benefits in the latest technology over older ones)
- Locked in - so no-one else can adjust them
- Missing some important features
- Not truly equivalent to the known models their clinicians compare them to verbally

### ✓ Buyer's Tip

ASK HOW MANY HEARING AID MANUFACTURERS THE HEARING CLINIC HAS ACCESS TO, AND LOOK FOR CLINICS THAT HAVE AT LEAST FOUR DIFFERENT MANUFACTURERS AVAILABLE. THIS MEANS YOU CAN MAKE THE BEST CHOICE THAT MEETS YOUR HEARING NEEDS AND BUDGET. PHONAK, OTICON, SIGNIA, WIDEX AND RESOUND ARE BRANDS YOU WOULD IDEALLY LIKE TO SEE ON THEIR LIST. WITH A CHOICE FROM THESE BRANDS, YOU CAN FIT PRETTY MUCH ANY HEARING LOSS AND COMBINATION OF NEEDS VERY WELL.

## Where to look for a good hearing specialist?

### ***Large retail chains***

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The most common place to find a hearing specialist with special interest in adult hearing rehabilitation and hearing aids is in a large retail chain.

There are several large retailers, each with many nationally-spread clinics. A large number of these chains are owned by hearing aid manufacturers, while others offer limited or white labled brands to allow for the largest possible profit margins and inventory control.

They often have a large demand for hearing care professionals due to their large size and multiple locations that need to be staffed, so they might be more willing to take on any audiologist or audiometrist, irrespective of skill or experience level.

You might find a good clinician in these ranks, but they might be limited in the products and services they can provide to you.

**Always check to make sure that a hearing aid manufacturer does NOT own the clinic.**

Many clinics in Australia are owned by a manufacturer, and they will be more likely to recommend the hearing devices they produce, which may not be the best option for your needs.

To make things worse, these clinics can quite often be some of the most expensive places to buy hearing aids from, especially when located in large shopping centres.

## ***Government-run hearing clinics***

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Hearing Australia is the only government-run hearing clinic in Australia. They were fairly recently put up for sale, so their tactics became much more commercial of late in order to drive revenue, which in turn would make the business more lucrative to a potential purchaser. The sale fell through, however, but as they are a large ship that turns slowly, some of their aggressive tactics may remain.

Hearing Australia currently has a supply contract with Signia Hearing aids, so you are most likely to be offered this brand above all others. They do have access to other brands, but this requires a complicated approval process, and their pricing does not appear competitive for the other brands.

Hearing Australia predominantly services clients under the Hearing Services program or NDIS.

Their audiologists are often fresh out of university, as it has traditionally been a good place to train, but there are quite a few long-serving clinicians who enjoy the benefits of a government job. As with any other clinic, you might find a few diamonds in the rough here, if you can tolerate the potential bureaucracy associated with a government run organisation, mixed with a newly acquired sales drive.

They have recently started pursuing private clients with ABNs as well. I personally would not consider them a good match for a self-funded client, based on their traditional focus and supporting processes geared specifically for the pensioner market. A self-funded client may receive better services and choice elsewhere in my opinion.

**Note: In 2018 they were fined by the ACCC for misleading pensioners, which is unheard of for a government-owned organisation. Their name change from Australian Hearing happened quite soon after this embarrassment.**  
<https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/leading-australian-hearing-clinic-pays-penalties-for-misleading-customers>

### **✓ Buyer's Tip**

**THE VARIETY OF HEARING OPTIONS ARE FREQUENTLY BETTER AT INDEPENDENT CLINICS AS OPPOSED TO THE LARGER CHAINS BECAUSE IT CAN BE DIFFICULT LOGISTICALLY, AS WELL AS COSTLY, FOR LARGE CHAINS TO OFFER MULTIPLE BRANDS. INDEPENDENT CLINICS OFTEN RELY ON WORD OF MOUTH REFERRALS, SO CUSTOMER SERVICE MAY ALSO BE BETTER.**

## ***Big box stores***

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These outlets, connected to discount warehouses or optical chains, often target the price sensitive buyer. These companies operate by selling hearing aids in large volumes at low prices.

Many of the hearing aids they aim to sell are from their own-brand products. These are often 're-badged' large brand hearing aids, sometimes using defeatured or previous generation technology. This means you can get them cheaper, but you are potentially buying technology which is well out of date.

Consider that hearing aids are essentially computers focused on sound. Optimal hearing is also critical to optimal brain health. Would you buy a 5 year old computer if a modern one could help you a lot more?

These companies are often involved in other products, outside of hearing as well, so hearing may not be 100% of their focus and might be just another income stream for them. They

also tend to be overseas owned, which means all your money is not necessarily staying in Australia.

Some hearing aids may be locked, which means you can only get them adjusted at the company you bought them from.

It is possible to find a good clinician in this mix, but bear in mind that the price you pay may also reflect, in my opinion, the level of customer service you could expect. You might be limited to the brands they sell as well as the time they have available to address your issues.

You may also find it difficult to find times for follow-up appointments, due to their suspected focus on turning over volume of new sales. This is one of the main reasons given as to why we see clients who have tried these services before moving over to us fairly regularly.

### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**ASK WHETHER THE COMPANY YOU ARE DEALING WITH IS AUSTRALIAN OWNED. SOME OF THE VERY LARGE HEARING DEVICE RETAILERS OPERATING IN AUSTRALIA ARE FOREIGN OWNED, WHICH MEANS ALL THEIR PROFITS GO ELSEWHERE, LEAVING VERY LITTLE FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY.**

## ***ENT linked audiologists***

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A common business model in Australia is that Ear Nose and Throat specialists own, or have a partnership with, an audiology business. This relationship is not always disclosed clearly.

The ENT refers their patients to the audiology clinic, and the audiologist performs testing for the ENT and also sells hearing aids if indicated. The ENT profits from both their own and the audiology clinic's income.

The audiologist might be a partner in the business, or simply work as an employee. There are two large chains in Australia as well as several smaller practices where this occurs.

The audiologists working in these clinics are diagnosticians first, and this might be reflected in their medical-style 'bedside manner'. They may appear to be more concerned with the results than the patient's emotional needs.

Their testing is comprehensive and accurate, with the aim of providing the ENT the information they require to perform their diagnosis.

Hearing aids might be an afterthought, although it may represent a sizable portion of their income.

Undoubtedly the audiologists working in this setting are diagnostically sound, but they may not have extensive experience in a range of hearing aids or bedside manner as they might have had working in other settings.

Hearing aids also tend to be on the more expensive side in these setups, despite them being more diagnostically focussed.

If you've been to see an ENT-owned clinic, you are likely to find a better deal, possibly even from themselves...

## ***Independent hearing specialists***

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Independent hearing specialists represent the smallest part of the Australian hearing aid industry, but they are also, by far, the most diverse group.

You will likely find an audiologist in pretty much any of the areas of specialty in this group. This group of around 290 clinics is shrinking as more and more manufacturers buy up their market share or others simply retire.

Many of these clinicians tend to be jacks-of-all-trades, as can be seen from the list of services on their websites, if they even have one. They would, however, still have a preferred specialty, but their focus is almost always 100% on hearing.

Value Hearing falls under the independent banner, so I'll try my utmost to be unbiased.

Independent clinicians are generally very passionate about what they do, as they often are also business owners. Even if the clinician simply works for the independent business, they are generally in much closer contact with the owner and their philosophies than they would be in a larger organisation.

Importantly, independent hearing practices are generally owned by hearing specialists, not by lawyers, entrepreneurs, investors, accountants, ENTs, or other non-audiologist owners. As such, the focus tends to be much more on the client or patient, rather than on the bottom line.



*Members of Value Hearing's Sydney team with me (on the right)*

Independent hearing specialists tend to not have any ties to specific manufacturers and can, as a general rule, freely prescribe the best hearing aid for your needs. Another benefit is that when you buy from independent hearing clinics, your money stays in Australia, and you are supporting a local business.

You are highly likely to find a good hearing care professional in this group, but you still need to take note of the specialty of the clinic by carefully considering their website or other marketing material. Some tend to focus more on children or diagnostics rather than hearing aids. The narrower their focus on the areas important to you, the more likely they are to deliver your best outcome.

So, if hearing aids are your priority, make sure they have sufficient interest and experience in a wide range of models.

You can easily find an independent hearing clinic by looking at their representative organisation's website.

[Independent Audiologists Australia](#) lists all their members with their interests and clearly states what they stand for. This is a great resource where you can find a good audiologist close to you.

You can also contact the Hearing Business Alliance (HBA), which represents independent hearing clinics when it comes to government policies for a clinic close to you.

One consideration when looking at an independent audiologist is to find out how long they have been in business. Starting a business is hard work, and most audiologists aren't business people. Look for a practice which has been in business for at least a few years if possible.

## "Bad" places to find good hearing specialists

### ***Affiliate or partner clinics***

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Recently there has been an upsurge in Affiliate or Partner clinics. Affiliate or Partner clinics are used by some Australian websites which sell hearing aids online.

To circumvent the hearing aid suppliers' requirements that their hearing aids need to be

fitted face-to-face, they have contracted to a number of small retailers to fit the online retailer's hearing aids for a fee.

They list the broad locations of the smaller partner clinics on their website. This makes the online retailer appear larger than they actually are as they have 'presence' in many different locations through their affiliates or partners.

The problem comes in because you are buying the hearing aids from the online retailer, not the partner.

The affiliate or partner may have very little to lose if you aren't happy with your purchase as they are simply paid for their fitting services. It is my belief that the only value proposition these kinds of sites offer is price, the illusion of convenience, and nothing else.

Ironically, their prices are often higher than can be obtained from independent clinics as they still need to give a cut to the clinician fitting their hearing aids.

If you have any issues with your hearing aids, it is technically not the affiliate/partner's problem, as they didn't sell you the hearing aid.

This may leave you to take up the issue with the online retailer alone, which may not have much interest in resolving the issue as you have no ongoing relationship. You can't expect to get serviced at any of their other partner clinic locations if you travel.

These types of business models are still relatively new in Australia (around since late 2014) and the quality of the outcomes this model delivers needs to be closely monitored, considering the concerns raised above.

An easy way to identify an affiliate or partner model is to check the company's locations on their website. If they DO NOT stipulate an exact address for some of their locations, then this indicates an affiliate or partner clinic.

The reason they do this is to control the sale. They only give you the partner clinic's details once you have committed to purchasing the hearing aids from them. They may also sell you the hearing aid online, which is then posted to the partner for the fitting.

✓ **Buyer's Tip**

**IF THE COMPANY THAT SOLD YOU THE AID DOES NOT MATCH THE NAME ON THE OFFICE WHERE YOU RECEIVE THE HEARING AID, THEN YOU ARE DEALING WITH A PARTNER OR AFFILIATE.**

There might be no defined customer journey as the clinicians in the partner clinics vary greatly in skill and experience. They are simply clinicians who have agreed to fit hearing aids for a fee, which is much less than the profit they make out of their "own" clients.

## ***Lead Generation Sites***

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Another recent, but concerning, trend has raised its head in the form of online lead generation sites. These kinds of websites position themselves as experts in their website copy, but often do not even employ any hearing care experts!

They are simply designed to collect your contact information and sell it off for a significant fee to whichever clinic is sufficiently desperate to buy the leads. I have also anecdotally noticed that a lot of these leads go to large chains of clinics.

This means that you are virtually playing Russian roulette with your hearing as you simply end up with the only clinician willing to pay for this kind of lead in your area and get limited choice.

Sometimes you can be lucky and find a good clinician this way, but, more often than not, this is not the case. Despite advertising the 'lowest prices', you are unlikely to actually get this as the middle-man still needs to take his cut.

The 'advice' offered by the lead generation website is often not clinical advice. They typically

say what they need to in order to get you to make an appointment.

To avoid this trap, make sure you ask the person you are corresponding with whether they are referring you to someone else. If so, ask for the clinic's direct contact details before you agree to anything in writing.

If they refuse, then you might be dealing with a lead generation website.

### ***Hearing clinics operating within doctor's practices***

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Some hearing clinics in Australia operate within medical practices. These often take the form of a rented room within the practice for a few days a month. Typically, these clinics may have agreements with the borrowed authority from being situated in the medical practice. Use the same due diligence when considering one of these clinics.

### ***Purchasing imported hearing aids***

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Recently there has been a prevalence of online sites selling hearing aids directly to consumers at unbelievably low prices. At first glance, these look like incredible deals that are hundreds or thousands of dollars cheaper than what you may have been offered in the clinic.

Getting something cheaper is always a good thing, particularly if the price differences are significant. What is not good is that some of these websites only highlight the price aspect while hiding the negative aspects, which could have a dramatic effect on your purchase decision if made clear.

Here are a few things to be on the lookout for:

- **Warranty:** One site mentions they offer 3 year local warranty. If you look at their warranty process, you submit a form to the retailer, and they decide whether the warranty claim is valid or not. This site parallel imports hearing aids on your behalf. Most suppliers will either just offer 1 year international warranty on these hearing aids while others won't touch them at all. So, it would be a simple matter for the online retailer to deny your warranty claim, leaving you out of pocket. We've had instances where a client came to us with a faulty imported hearing aid, only for the manufacturer to deny their claim as they hadn't supplied it and as such were not the legal sponsor of the device.
- **Years in business:** Many of these online deal stores have just popped up out of nowhere quite recently. Considering your hearing aid warranty might be closely linked to their existence, it is important to consider how long they have been in business. What happens when they go out of business? This last point is not moot as they are walking a fine legal line and may be shut down without notice leaving you without recourse.
- **Set-up and support:** Most of these importers do not set up the aid for you, but rather expect you to find a clinic to do the fitting at a fee. You may well find that the costs to do so exceed the discount you achieved by purchasing an illegal import (that is if you can find someone to help you in the first place). The clinic supporting it also has no responsibility for the device, so if something technically goes wrong with the aid, you may well be on your own again.
- **Lack of refund:** Most of these sites do not offer any refund on the hearing aids they sold unless it is faulty or they sent the incorrect model. This means that if you do find someone to fit the device, they may not set it up the same way as where you may have first trialled the device, leaving you lacking and frustrated.
- **Genuine product?:** There have been cases where online retailers dig out hearing aids from the manufacturer's reject bin and resell these online for massive discounts. In other cases, cheap Chinese copies that appear close



to the original are sold as the original but without its functionality. I've not witnessed this issue myself, but have been told by several suppliers of cases where this happened.

Even though this may be an attractive option for some, it isn't without its challenges. It is truly a matter of buyer beware as the savings are really due to sacrifices you need to be happy with.

## 8

# What Makes A Good Hearing Care Professional For YOU

## What Makes A Good Hearing Care Professional For YOU

### ***Do your homework on the clinic before you make an appointment***

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You might like to ask the clinic how long the company has been in business, as there are many newcomers promising the world without having any proven sustainability to support you and your investment going into the future.

A company that has been in existence at least five (5) years is ideal as they are past the difficult start-up years and are starting to see repeat business come their way. The benefit to you is that you are more likely to enjoy continued support if they stick around.

Once you have shortlisted clinics you may want to work with, then your homework begins.

Whilst considering an audiologist, you can do a bit of research on them and the company they work for/in before making first contact.

The best places to do this is to look at their website or search their name on Google to see their Facebook or LinkedIn profiles. Also see if they have published anything on YouTube.



### ***Look at the company website***

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Looking at a company's website content can give you some unique insights into their focus and specialities.

A website listing hearing aid models and pricing first and foremost may be more focussed on the hearing aid sale than on your best outcomes.

Look for a provider who is focussed on you. Does their website speak about you and your needs, or about the company and their achievements? Do they use the words 'we' and 'our' more than they use the words 'you' and 'your'?

Are they focussed on educating you, or is it simply a 'brochure' website with little to show how they are uniquely interested in you? Worse still, are they trying to just sell you some hearing aids at the cheapest pricing possible without much regard for the longer term care necessary to guarantee long term outcomes? This low-price model is easy to sell as most consumers don't realise the importance of support and aftercare well after the initial sale.

An audiologist working in a company not focussed on you might be limited in what they can offer you in relation to long term care, no matter how good they are.

#### **✓ Buyer's Tip**

**SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ANY INFORMATION ON HOW THE AUDIOLOGISTS WORKING IN THE COMPANY ARE TRAINED IN THE COMPANY'S PHILOSOPHIES. IT IS ALL GOOD AND WELL HAVING WONDERFUL WEBSITE CONTENT, BUT IF THERE ARE NO PROCESSES IN PLACE TO ENSURE ALL THE AUDIOLOGISTS WORKING IN THE COMPANY FOLLOW THE SAME LINE OF THINKING, THEN THE RESULTS COULD BE LACKING.**

## Check out the Reviews

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Review the testimonials to ensure that you are dealing with a clinic that is dedicated to excellent client outcomes. Also check Google and Facebook for reviews as well as website testimonials. Note that testimonials on their own website, even though worthwhile reading, may tend to only show positive experiences. Make sure the reviews are a mixture of new clients (first time users), long term clients (have worn hearing aids for a few years), and existing users (have used hearing aids for a while and came from another provider).

Look for independent reviews on the company you are interested in on their Google Maps listing (search their name and location on Google and a map listing will show up with all their reviews).

The retailer has no control over these reviews and cannot delete those they don't like. As such, these reviews give you a clearer picture of what is actually happening with customers in the clinic, and how the business responds to customer complaints. An easy way to find real testimonials is to simply Google: "clinic name" +reviews

**Note: Recent (2021) changes to the code of ethics of the professional bodies for hearing care professionals actually advise against having testimonials, which makes it even harder for the consumer to identify clinics inspiring customer reviews versus those who don't.**

### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**MAKE SURE THERE IS A MIX OF NEW CLIENTS AND CLIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN DOING BUSINESS WITH THE COMPANY FOR A FEW YEARS REPRESENTED IN THE REVIEWS. IT IS EASIER TO KEEP A NEW CLIENT HAPPY, THAN TO KEEP CLIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN WITH THE COMPANY FOR YEARS HAPPY. LOOK FOR AUDIOLOGISTS' NAMES THAT KEEP COMING UP IN THESE REVIEWS.**

Once you have found the clinics with the best reviews that resonate with your needs, then it is time to make first contact.

## Are they responsive?

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When you first contact a clinic where your candidate hearing specialist works, take special note of how quickly you are responded to. Also pay attention to how the person on the phone speaks to you during your call. How did they make you feel?

Even if it is not the audiologist you speak to or email with in this first interaction, the way you are treated at the first contact is very telling of what you might expect going forward. The person first responding to you is the public face of the business and things don't generally get better after the first contact.

Speed of response is important. Certainly, you wouldn't expect a quick response outside of business hours or over the weekend. It is, however, fair to expect that any contact requests via webforms, emails or voice messages are responded to in less than an hour during business hours.

If you are happy with what you read by email or hear on the phone, it is time to go and see the hearing specialist. Typically, you would start with a hearing test or a hearing aid discussion appointment. These may be free, as in the case of Value Hearing, or there may be a charge associated.

Pay attention to the communication leading up to the first appointment. Are you reminded of appointments? How is the intake process? Those who pay more attention to these details, may be more focussed on your experience as a whole.

## *Their 'bedside manner'*

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Audiologists in Australia were traditionally trained scientifically. This means their focus has been on science, rather than on client care. Over the last few years, patient-centred care has come more into focus.

With client-centred care, you are the focus, and the audiologist is encouraged to build rapport with you, getting to know you and your lifestyle and emotional needs better. In this way they can offer the most effective recommendations and better guide you to the outcomes you seek.

The scientific approach is more in line with the old-school medical model. In this model, you are simply a patient to be worked on rather than worked with. Little care is given to your experience, and you are told what to do, rather than guided to the best solution.

You might be able to pick the difference by seeing if you are referred to as a patient (medical model) or client.

The way the reception and/or audiologist greets you can also be revealing. Being acknowledged when you enter the clinic and greeted warmly is more in line with a client-centred approach.



Making you wait excessively without apologising for making you wait is more consistent with a traditional medical approach.

As hearing loss and the journey to better hearing is very much an emotional journey, the client-centred approach is the one we feel serves our clients better.

If you are more a traditionalist and are happy to be told what to do and when with little support, then you might prefer the medical model.

## 9

# What to Ask When Making Your Appointment



## What to ask when making your appointment

When making the initial appointment, it is important to determine what type of hearing testing will occur and who will be conducting the testing. Many clinics will do a simple hearing screening, also called a hearing check, which may be performed by unqualified support staff or even using a computerised self-check kiosk.

Depending on whether or not they have deemed you to have passed or failed this screening, they will use high pressure selling to book you a complete assessment with their hearing specialist to purchase hearing aids.

A hearing check is not a bad concept on its own, however. If you are unsure as to whether you have any hearing difficulties, a hearing check can let you know the basic status of your hearing, and whether it is worthwhile spending the time and money on a more comprehensive assessment.

It is important to check that the person performing this test is a qualified professional.

However, if you have clear or confirmed concerns about your hearing, choose a clinic that will do a complete hearing assessment from the outset as it will certainly save you time.

These are relatively inexpensive (or free), and the small cost you pay for this assessment will ensure that the hearing specialist has a comprehensive understanding of your lifestyle, hearing needs, and hearing difficulties from the beginning, enabling them to recommend the most suitable options for you. A good hearing assessment is the foundation your hearing improvement is based on, so it needs to be comprehensive and accurate.

Ensuring that you have an appointment for a full comprehensive hearing assessment will save you extra appointments in the long-term.



### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**AN EASY WAY TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU ARE LIKELY TO RECEIVE A SCREENING OR A FULL HEARING ASSESSMENT IS TO ASK HOW LONG THE APPOINTMENT WILL TAKE. A SCREENING APPOINTMENT IS USUALLY LESS THAN 30 MINUTES, WHILE A FULL ASSESSMENT APPOINTMENT CAN TAKE 1 TO 1½ HOURS.**

A comprehensive hearing assessment appointment takes between 1 to 1½ hours to complete. This allows enough time for the testing to be done, as well as for you to review your hearing needs and options with your hearing specialist. This will save you time in the long run by reducing your need to return for another appointment.

## 10

# What to Expect from a Hearing Assessment

## What to Expect from a Hearing Assessment

**Y**our first appointment with your hearing specialist may be a hearing assessment to determine the extent of your hearing problems and ascertain the most suitable treatment option for you.

You will be asked a series of questions about your hearing difficulties and where specifically you have problems (in groups, out in social gatherings, with the TV or phone, for example).

**Be sure to bring the list you prepared from the Preparing To Buy Hearing Aids section to assist you and your specialist.**

The hearing specialist should also want to determine a possible cause of the hearing problem, so you will be asked questions to help them pinpoint why it has occurred. This process should feel empowering, and you should feel listened to and understood. If not, then this may not be the right clinic for you.

Don't be disappointed if the cause of the hearing loss cannot be determined, as this is not always possible.

Before the assessment commences, the hearing specialist should have a look in your ears using an **otoscope**. This will reveal any built-up wax, ear infections, or middle ear issues that may affect your hearing or help explain the test results.

Some better-equipped clinics use a **video otoscope** that allows you to see what the hearing specialist sees on a television monitor. It is a unique and highly empowering experience being able to see inside your own ears. You are then able to confirm and better understand what is noted and discussed. I highly recommend it.

You should then undergo a pain-free hearing assessment, which takes about 20 to 30 minutes.

You will be asked to respond to sounds heard through two different types of headphones with the click of a hand-held button or by simply raising your hand. This helps your specialist determine the softest sounds you can hear (your hearing thresholds) over a wide frequency range. This will give the clinician an idea of the functioning of your ears and your overall hearing sensitivity.

Your speech discrimination should also be assessed. Speech discrimination testing determines your ability to hear speech in quiet.

During this testing you will be asked to repeat single words heard through the headphones. Sometimes noise might be played in the opposite ear to prevent it helping the ear being tested. This test helps the specialist to confirm whether amplification via hearing instruments can benefit you.

Ideally, a hearing assessment should also include a speech-in-noise test, which gives insight into your ability to hear and understand speech in a noisy environment. A speech in noise test consists of short sentences presented in the presence of background party noise. You are instructed to repeat the sentences.



Good word recognition in quiet doesn't automatically mean good word recognition in noise. Therefore, speech tests in noise give more insight into what hearing solution will be the most suitable for you to assist you not only in quiet environments, but also in the presence of background noise.

✓ Buyer's Tip

**ASSESSING SPEECH DISCRIMINATION IN SPEECH BABBLE NOISE CAN HELP THE SPECIALIST DETERMINE WHICH HEARING DEVICE'S NOISE REDUCING CAPABILITIES BEST MATCH YOUR HEARING ABILITY IN NOISE. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS TYPE OF TESTING IS RARE IN AUSTRALIA, EVEN THOUGH THE TEST MATERIALS ARE WIDELY AVAILABLE. NOT HAVING THIS TEST DONE COULD COST YOU THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN HEARING AID TECHNOLOGY THAT YOU DON'T NEED.**

Finally, you may have a pressure test done to see if your middle ear system is functioning normally, which is an automatic test that only takes a few seconds.

Once the specialist has all the information, they will explain the results to you, and, depending on the results and what you have told them about your perceived difficulties, they will discuss your rehabilitation options with you.

Rehabilitation options can range from a variety of solutions such as:

- Doing nothing at all
- Monitor your hearing in the future
- Being referred to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist, or
- Recommending hearing devices and associated accessories, if appropriate.

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# What Information Should You Expect?

## What Information Should You Expect?

**W**hen discussing your results and recommendations, you should expect to be taken through the assessment procedures, and be told why specific tests were used, as well as what the results were for each test.

**You should also expect some education on how we normally hear, and how your hearing is different from normal. This will help you to understand what the best course of action is for your particular case.**

### ✓Buyer's Tip

**IF HEARING DEVICES ARE AN OPTION FOR YOU, YOU SHOULD BE GIVEN CLEAR, EASY TO UNDERSTAND INFORMATION ON WHAT HEARING AIDS ARE BEST FOR YOU AND WHY. UNDERSTANDING HOW A PARTICULAR HEARING DEVICE SUITS YOUR NEEDS WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU TO DECIDE ON WHICH ONE TO PROCEED WITH.**

For many people there are usually one or two devices from different hearing instrument manufacturers which will be ideal.

- Your clinician may recommend one model above others based on your results.
- It should be made clear to you why this particular model was chosen.
- If you aren't sure why a particular model was recommended, **ask!**

Ideally, you should be given the opportunity to see, feel, and hear through the recommended solution. Sometimes this is not always possible, particularly if a custom-made solution is indicated.

**It is important that you like the way your hearing provider works with you.**

This is a person you need to trust to guide you through your journey to better hearing, and that is not possible without trust.

Your provider also needs to take the time to empower you after carefully listening to your needs. Never feel embarrassed to ask if something is not clear, or if you want more information on a topic.

Empowerment should consist of ensuring that you understand your hearing in a way that makes sense to you. You also need to feel confident in them and their recommendations.

### ✓Buyer's Tip

**IF THE INFORMATION SEEMS LACKING, OR IT DOES NOT HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR HEARING PROBLEM, OR YOUR AVAILABLE OPTIONS, INSIST ON FURTHER EXPLANATION TO CLARIFY ANY MISUNDERSTANDING.**

It is *your* hearing after all, and you can more successfully and satisfactorily improve your hearing and your life by being empowered and informed.



### ***How informed did you feel during the consultation?***

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Is the hearing specialist audiologist interested in your needs? One way is to see if they ever ask you what you'd like to achieve in the initial appointment.

Do you feel listened to? A good clinician will give you opportunities to ask questions and will give appropriate and clear answers, taking your needs, as mentioned, during the consultation, into account. You should never feel rushed, ignored, judged, or patronised.

### ***How did you feel after the initial consultation?***

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Did you feel well informed and satisfied? Or did you feel underwhelmed with many questions unanswered. Or perhaps just overwhelmed?

### ***Did you feel pushed into a decision?***

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You should feel empowered to make the right decision for you with the confidence that the hearing care professional can back up their recommendation with great outcomes. Your decision should never be based on pushy sales tactics.

### ***Are they free to make choices that are best for you?***

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Take care when you speak to a clinician working in some of the larger retail chains. Ask them what brands they mainly work with. Are these brands white label brands or known brands such as Phonak, Unitron, Widex, GN ReSound, Starkey, Beltone, Bernafon, Sonic, Signia, and Oticon?

Also feel free to ask what other models they might consider as alternatives, and why the model they recommended was the one they did. They should be able to confidently and clearly explain why a specific model is the one they feel is most likely to work for you and your unique situation.

### ***Did they ask about any special needs you may have?***

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If you have any needs you consider to be special, ask the hearing specialist about their experience and expertise in this area.

Some clinicians may specialise in certain conditions like profound hearing loss, Meniere's disease, or severe tinnitus. If you have any of these conditions, you are better served by an audiologist with plenty of experience in this field.

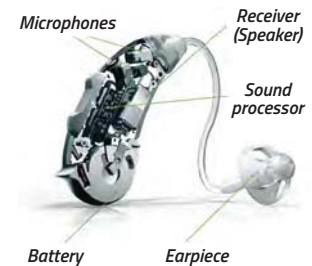
## 12

# Types of Hearing Aids & How They Work

## Types of Hearing Aids & How They Work

There are four main components common to all hearing aids currently available on the market. They are:

1. A **microphone** which picks up the sounds from your environment and then converts them into electrical impulses. These electrical impulses—or signals—are then sent to the amplifier.
2. The **amplifier** boosts the volume of these electrical signals, making it easier to hear. The amplified signals are then sent to the receiver and speaker. Modern hearing aids use a computer chip which acts as an amplifier and that runs various calculations to clean up the sound for you.
3. The **receiver or speaker** inside of hearing aids converts the amplified electrical signals back into sounds and then sends them directly to the ear where the natural hearing process takes over and the brain receives the impulses.
4. To keep this process working, a **battery** is needed inside of the hearing aids. This can be a cell or rechargeable battery.



So, essentially, a hearing aid is simply a tiny amplifier, kind of like the ones guitars or PA systems use. Let's take a closer look at the four components to better understand which types of hearing aids make the best hearing aids.

### How do Hearing Aids Work — The Microphone

Sound waves are actually waves of energy which are travelling through the air. Just as the waves you make in a pool diminish in power the further away they get from the source, the further away from the source (eg. a mouth, a radio, a television) that sound waves get, the weaker they get.

In order to make these vibrations louder again, a microphone must pick them up and convert them from the sound waves into electrical impulses or signals. In the best hearing aids, the microphone is ultra-tiny and has a wide range of pickup to deliver the least distorted signal into the rest of the hearing aid. Hearing aids pick up sound best if it is within 7 metres from the source of the sound.

### How do Hearing Aids Work — Electronic Amplifier

Since the purpose of hearing aids is the amplification of sound, there must be an amplification device inside the unit.

Amplifiers don't actually turn up the *sound* per se; what they do is increase the *strength* of the electrical signal. Digital hearing aids do this by multiplying the incoming sound by an amount needed for your hearing loss at a particular point.

The key here is boosting the strength enough so that it will eventually become more audible when it is turned back into sound, but not so much that distortion or further hearing damage occurs.

If the signal is boosted too much, the distortion will produce sounds that are unrecognisable to our ears when compared to the source. Modern hearing aid amplifiers can also selectively change the sound based on the level of background noise, automatically giving you more clarity.

Your hearing specialist is trained to get the sound just right, so it is comfortable without causing more damage to your hearing.

## ***How do Hearing Aids Work — The Receiver / Speaker***

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No, these aren't two different parts—the receiver is the industry term for a speaker.

The function of the speaker is simple, but crucial: convert the strengthened electrical signal back into sound. It must do this without distorting the sound or weakening the strength of the signal, otherwise, all of the work done by the hearing aid thus far will be lost.

Sound quality is generally better the closer the speaker is to the ear canal. The speaker is normally protected by a wax filter, which stops wax or moisture damaging it. A blocked wax filter is a common cause of hearing aids not working. Fortunately, it is an easy fix.

## ***How do Hearing Aids Work — The Power Supply***

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The most important part of the hearing aid is the battery because without it nothing would work.

Batteries are the preferred source of power for hearing aids because they are inexpensive and can be changed or recharged fairly easily.

One of the most critical things to look for in a good battery is the constant delivery of a consistent voltage from full charge to no charge—you don't want spikes and dips in your energy source. Cheap hearing aid batteries can cause many issues, so make sure you only use [quality hearing aid batteries](#).

These days there are also several [rechargeable hearing aid options](#) available to choose from.



## ***Types of Hearing Aids***

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There are various different styles and types of [hearing aids](#) with different capabilities and features to suit different levels of hearing loss.

Here I give an introductory overview of each type. To find out more, click on the links for more information on each, including:

- Advantages and disadvantages
- How they work, and
- Who they are best suited to.

## ***Behind The Ear Hearing Aids***

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Behind The Ear (BTE) Hearing Aids are the world's most common and longest standing hearing aid style as they service the broadest and most general types of [hearing loss](#). These instruments are recognisable from their compact case which sits right behind the ear. They are normally what people with no personal experience with them think about when they think about hearing aids.

This small casing houses the hearing aid itself as well as the battery, electronics, and controls for operating the aid. Located inside the ear is a customised ear mould which is connected to the case by a clear, plastic tube.

This piece of tubing transmits the sound from the case to the ear mould, allowing the wearer to stay connected to the world around them.



In recent years, BTEs have become even smaller. These super small Open Fit BTEs gives the wearer great sound quality as the thin tubing is attached to the hearing aid and leads sound down to the inside of the ear canal.

There are many wonderful features that come with your BTE Hearing Aids. Some models allow direct [streaming of phone calls and media to the hearing aid](#), a music mode to help the wearer enjoy listening, a [tinnitus](#) masker, and a program setting which automatically determines when more help is needed to combat background noise. They also come in rechargeable versions, making them easier to use without having to fiddle with replacing batteries – just to name a few.

### **Advantages of BTE Hearing Aids:**

- Durable with high degrees of water resistance in modern models
- Easy to clean and maintain
- Great for smaller ear canals
- Easily control volume
- Suitable for all degrees of hearing loss
- Can have larger batteries for longer usage times
- For all ages
- Often contains telecoil for connection to landline phones and loop systems

### **Disadvantages of BTE Hearing Aids:**

- Visible
- Potential space limitations for eyeglass wearers
- Can feel uncomfortable or stifling, particularly with smaller ear canals or greater hearing losses.
- Old models or incorrectly fitted ear moulds can cause large amounts of feedback
- Might be more prone to wind noise - dependent on microphone placement and design.

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

These hearing aids are ideal for any severity of hearing loss whether the patient is suffering from an extremely mild through to profound hearing loss. These days, they are normally found in fully subsidised hearing aids for Australian pensioners as well as in hearing aids designed for more severe hearing loss where they are the only option. The smaller Open Fit BTEs are especially beneficial to those suffering from milder degrees of hearing loss.

If you would like more information about Behind The Ear hearing aids or any other hearing aid type, talk to your hearing specialist.

### ***Completely In The Canal Hearing Aid***

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True to its name, the Completely In The Canal Hearing Aid is located completely inside your ear canal. This location boasts two benefits – it renders the aid almost completely invisible and the sound the aid produces has a natural quality.

Completely In The Canal (CIC) hearing aids are tailor-made by making a custom mould of the wearer's ear canal. When a CIC is made and fitted correctly, it should fit comfortably and be cosmetically pleasing due to the aids near invisibility. As the aid itself can't be removed from the ear canal using your fingers, a small extraction cord is attached to the hearing aid shell allowing for easy removal. In order to fit in the ear canal, the shell is fitted out with some of the smallest components available which means that battery life, amplification and user controls are somewhat limited.

### **Advantages of CIC Hearing Aids:**

- Very discreet due to small size and fit location within ear
- Custom made for you
- High cosmetic appeal
- Easy to wear with eyeglasses
- Great quality, natural sound through use of outer ear
- Location of microphone helps with using the telephone
- Protected from wind



### **Disadvantages of CIC Hearing Aids:**

- Susceptible to damage from ear wax and moisture
- Less reliable around background noise as it cannot be fitted with directional microphones
- Battery life and amplification is limited
- User controls are limited
- Not suitable for people with narrow or bendy ear canals
- Not appropriate for people with poor manual dexterity due to size of the aid
- Not suitable for children
- Tends not to have modern features like rechargeable batteries and Bluetooth Connectivity.
- They can make the user feel more blocked off as they take up the whole ear canal. This is especially noticeable when you have milder hearing loss.
- Thin hearing aid shells can be more prone to cracking, which can be fixed with a \$200-\$400 repair.

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

CIC hearing aids are suitable for wearers who would like an aid that is aesthetically pleasing and potentially invisible. They are most beneficial to wearers who are experiencing mild to moderate hearing loss and who has good speech in noise test scores

The aid is not suitable for wearers who feel that they have difficulty using their hands or for people who have especially narrow or bendy ear canals or who dislike the blocked feeling these aids tend to cause.

### ***In The Canal Hearing Aids***

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In The Canal Hearing Aids are custom fitted to your ear canal's size and shape.

Although this style of hearing aid is slightly larger than smaller In Canal aids (like the Invisible In The Canal and Completely In Canal hearing aids) they are only partially visible in the outer ear. With a wide range of colours available, they blend in to the natural shadows of the ear.

The In The Canal Hearing Aid shell is created using impressions taken from the wearer's ear. The components, including the microphone are housed within this shell and a tiny portion of the aid leads down into the ear canal to direct sound.

With a small increase in size comes many benefits. The ITC aid can have a directional microphone which produces a better sound quality in noisy environments, and the wearer can discriminate between sounds coming in front or behind them. There are also manual controls, like a volume wheel so the wearer feels more in control of what they are hearing.



They can also have space for a telecoil for improved connection with compatible landline phones and public loop systems.

### **Advantages of In The Canal Hearing Aids:**

- Relatively easy to insert and remove
- Discreet due to size and colour availability
- Custom made for you
- Easy to wear with eyeglasses
- Longer battery life than IIC and CIC aids
- Directional microphone for better use in noisy situations
- Volume control options including remote control
- Easy for phone use as microphone position naturally lines up with the phone when held normally
- Some have rechargeable batteries and Bluetooth capability



### **Disadvantages of In The Canal Hearing Aids:**

- Not as discreet as IIC and CIC hearing aids
- Susceptible to damage from ear wax and moisture so potentially less reliable than over the ear models
- Some wearers may feel 'blocked-up' by aid in their ear
- Not ideal for people with very poor manual dexterity due to size of the aid
- Custom shells can break, meaning more frequent repairs compared to over the ear models.

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

In The Canal Hearing Aids suit a broad spectrum of people living with hearing loss. They are most suited to people who experience mild to moderate hearing loss, but some brands produce fairly powerful models for more severe hearing loss. As the shell is still quite small, some people who have difficulty using their hands may encounter trouble maintaining and inserting this device.

### ***Invisible In The Canal Hearing Aids***

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Invisible In The Canal Hearing Aids are the smallest type of hearing aid on the market.

Fitting snugly deep inside the ear canal, they allow the wearer to benefit from the natural shape of the outer ear helping the aid to produce a clear and vibrant sound.

With the aid's location close to the eardrum, the chance of sound distortion is also minimised. The discrete location and available colours of the hearing aid shell makes the IIC aid the most aesthetically pleasing choice.

Invisible In the Canal Hearing Aids are custom-fit to each individual's ear. They are made possible through the use of a laser scanner to map out the ear's impressions and a 3D printer which creates the hearing aid shell.

The components of this hearing aid are wrapped in this tiny shell and because of its small size, they don't usually come with any volume or program controls.



### **Advantages of IIC Hearing Aids:**

- Very discreet due to location deep inside the ear canal
- Custom made for you
- Easy to wear with eyeglasses
- Great quality, natural sound through use of outer ear
- Better sound localisation (help determines the direction of sound) and minimal distortion
- Colour of hearing aid shell designed to blend in with the ear

### **Disadvantages of IIC Hearing Aids:**

- Highly susceptible to damage from ear wax and moisture
- Not suitable for people with narrow or bendy ear canals
- No manual or volume controls
- Battery life is limited
- Not appropriate for people with poor manual dexterity due to size of the aid
- Shell thickness is often very thin, meaning more frequent breakages and repairs unless you opt for models with titanium shells, which are more expensive.
- Limited ability to improve hearing in noise
- No Bluetooth or Rechargeable options
- Technology lags up to a year behind over the ear models in some cases as the market for IIC devices is smaller.
- Is likely to give the user a blocked up feeling especially with milder hearing loss.

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

IIC Hearing Aids are ideal for wearers who experience mild to moderate hearing loss. As these aids are incredibly small and located so deep inside the ear, they are not suitable for people that have narrow or particularly windy ear canals.

These hearing aids are the tiniest on the market and are suitable for people who have control over their fine motor functions. A good use of fine motor skills is necessary to ensure that maintenance and use remains as easy as possible.

### ***In The Ear Hearing Aids***

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The In The Ear Hearing Aid may not be the most popular option due to its visibility, but it is a leader of its field when it comes to battery life in the custom group of hearing aids.

The circuitry which this aid runs on is all housed in a custom-made ear mould.

This mould sits just inside the ear, filling some of the bowl of the outer ear with a portion leading down into the ear canal.

All of the hearing aid components of this aid are contained in one shell – either a Full Shell or a Half Shell depending on how much of the ear bowl it fills – and users have no wires or tubes to challenge them.

The shell is generally custom-fit from an impression of the user's ear and made available in a range of skin tones to blend with the colours found in the outer ear.



This approach guarantees that the aid is an exact match for the ear, and ensures comfort and ease of insertion and removal.

### **Advantages of the In The Ear Hearing Aids:**

- Long battery life
- Easy to use on telephone as microphone lines up with phone speaker and can have telecoil built in
- Easy use for people with limited dexterity
- Easy access to controls
- Noise reduction
- Directional technology
- Some models have Bluetooth connectivity and are rechargeable
- More power due to size of battery and larger speakers that can be fitted in these.

### **Disadvantages of the In The Ear Hearing Aids:**

- Highly visible
- May be susceptible to moisture and wax within the ear

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

In The Ear hearing aids suit adults who have mild, moderate and severe hearing difficulties.

Larger than some of the other styles out there, this aid is ideal for users who have trouble using their hands for small tasks or where other custom styles tend to slip out of the ears. This style may not be as cosmetically appealing as other styles, but the long battery life makes it perfect for users who may forget to charge or change their batteries, or for those with more severe hearing loss

## ***Receiver In The Ear Hearing Aids***

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Receiver In The Ear (RITE) and Receiver In The Canal (RIC) hearing aids are one of the most popular options available on the market. Barely visible when worn, the Receiver In Canal hearing aid sits behind the ear and delivers sound directly to the receiver in the ear canal which gives the sound a more natural quality. It also has all the best hearing aid features available. It really offers hearing without compromise.

The aid draws from the cosmetic appeal of the In The Canal hearing aid and the flexibility, sound quality and power that you find in Behind The Ear (BTE) hearing aids.

Clear sound quality combined with cosmetic appeal and comfort makes this type of aid a leader of the pack.

### **How They Work**

The small shell which sits behind the ear houses the components and controls. As the name suggests, the receiver sits inside the ear canal and is connected to the shell by an ultra-thin sound transmitting wire. The distance between the receiver and shell (the microphone) creates enough space between the components so that feedback is kept to an absolute minimum.



### **Discreet Hearing Aids**

As the receiver component is not included in the casing behind the ear, the shell can be made incredibly small – small enough to be discreet, but large enough to contain technologies

such as feedback cancellation, directional microphones for better hearing in noisy spaces, Bluetooth capability, rechargeability, telecoil as well as moisture resistance to enhance durability.

There are also mini receiver in the ear hearing aids available.

### **Who does this hearing aid suit?**

The Receiver In Canal hearing aid suits every level and severity of hearing loss. Depending on the coupling to the ear, the aid can be fit for milder losses or set up with a high-power receiver to help those with profound hearing loss. These aids are a great choice for people who want it all, while keeping things discreet as the controls are easy to adjust.

### **Advantages of RIC Hearing Aids:**

- Available in mini sizes
- Great sound direction into canal.
- Directional microphone.
- Standard or custom earmoulds.
- Great cosmetic appeal due to low visibility.
- Variety of colour options.
- Natural sound through the ear canal.
- Has all the best features available
- Low feedback.
- Easy to adjust.
- Bluetooth capability.
- Rechargeable options
- Receiver issues can be fixed in-clinic without the need to send the aid in for repair.

### **Disadvantages of RIC Hearing Aids:**

- Receiver can be affected by wax or moisture.
- People with dexterity problems may have difficulty inserting this aid.

The pros of this hearing aid certainly outweigh the cons as you can see above, making them a common and much-admired choice.

## ***Rechargeable Hearing Aids***

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In the past decade or so, there has been some experimentation with rechargeable hearing aids. Most notably Siemens (now Signia) and GN Resound (who later stopped using these batteries). Siemens uses an older nickel-metal-hydride battery, which delivers about 8-10 hours of use per charge.

In 2017, everything started to change in regards to rechargeable hearing aids. A company called ZPower<sup>®</sup> started gaining traction with their rechargeable Zinc-Air hearing aid battery. They have since gone under, and most suppliers have switched over completely to Lithium-Ion batteries as the go-to standard for hearing aid rechargeability.

### **Lithium-Ion hearing aid batteries**

Lithium-Ion batteries are built into the hearing aids and cannot be removed by the user. You simply put the hearing aid in the charger overnight. By doing so you receive around 24 hours of use from the rechargeable hearing aid including some use while streaming. Some hearing aids are now offering up to 60 hours! These batteries are designed to last at least 2 to 6 years, depending on brand, but are replaced when the hearing aids go to the manufacturer for repair or servicing.



Pricing options differ between suppliers. Some include the charger in their pricing, whereas most others don't. It's important to make sure any quotes include the charger as the hearing aid won't function without it. As a rule, we quote our hearing aid prices including the charger, so there are no nasty surprises.

Lithium-Ion hearing aid batteries are controlled by a chip, so you shouldn't have any issues with overcharging or exploding batteries. Due to the small size of the batteries, they are also safe to fly with.

Lithium Ion is available in most hearing aid brands and is even seen in some in-the-ear hearing aids. Some chargers have built-in or add on battery packs. This makes it great if you travel in places where a USB power point is not always available.

### **Lithium-Ion battery pros for hearing aids:**

- Can deliver over 24 full hours of charge including about 5 hours of streaming on a single 3-hour charge.
- Quick charging - a quick 30-minute charge gives you 6 hours of use
- Can last all day, no matter how full your day is (always check the particular model with your hearing care specialist).
- There is generally no battery door, so the hearing aid is more moisture resistant than those with battery doors.
- Safe
- A single battery can last over 5+ years - so no additional ongoing costs - varies between models and brands.
- Very low risk of battery ingestion



### **Lithium-Ion Hearing aid battery cons:**

- You either need a power point or a power pack to ensure you don't end up with a dead hearing aid when travelling. (Fortunately, all hearing aid chargers can charge off USB)
- The Lithium-Ion battery makes the hearing aid a bit bigger than ones with a standard size 312 or 13 battery.
- The hearing might need to be sent for repair when the battery requires replacement. Some brands like Oticon allows for in-clinic replacement.

## ***Bluetooth Hearing Aids***

Arguably, the most significant development in hearing aid technology over the last few years has been direct connection between hearing devices and mobile phones. Bluetooth has been a longstanding feature of wireless hearing aids, but has previously required a 'middle man' device worn on the user to connect the two technologies.

With the development of direct wireless hearing aid technology, we have seen more varied opportunities for utilisation, as well as increased convenience and 'fun' for hearing aid users. Most importantly, we have seen substantial benefit from this technology for those previously struggling to hear on the phone!

### **Different Kinds Of Bluetooth Hearing aid technologies**

Bluetooth Classic is the type of Bluetooth found in wireless headphones, wireless speakers, etc. It is by far the best sounding and most flexible type of Bluetooth for wireless audio, but it has one big issue - battery drain.

Hearing aids and battery drain do not mix well.

If you tried to use an off the shelf Bluetooth Classic chip and run that off a hearing aid battery, you might be lucky to get 20 minutes of streaming, from what I've been told.

The solution to this problem was delivered by Apple in the form of the Made for iPhone Hearing Aid (MFI) standard. This is a low power solution that can stream audio and data. The caveat is that it streams lower quality audio compared to Bluetooth Classic and only works on post 2014 iPhones and iPads.

Google has worked with GN Resound to bring to light their low energy solution called ASHA (Audio Streaming for Hearing Aid). This is available now and will only work on the latest Android phones, before it slowly rolls out to the rest of the brands and models. Most hearing aid companies have compatibility checker websites to help see if your phone is compatible.

Sonova, who makes Phonak (their premium brand) as well as Unitron, has released Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids that use true Bluetooth Classic, but at much lower power. They are now on their third generation of Bluetooth capable hearing aids, with the Marvel being extremely popular, and the new Paradise further improving on it.

Their wireless hearing aids can stream audio in stereo – not only phone calls, but any audio from any Bluetooth 4.2 or higher source. This means these hearing aids work with iPhone, Android, older flip phones, most smart phones, laptops, computers, etc.

You can [read more about the evolution of Bluetooth hearing aids here](#).

Things you can do with a Bluetooth hearing aid:

- Stream phone calls directly into your hearing aids.
- Stream music, movie soundtracks or podcasts directly in stereo (mono if you are only using one aid) into your hearing aids.
- Use your phone as a remote microphone for your hearing aids (iPhone hearing aids only).
- Get your hearing aids adjusted remotely by your clinician via your recent version smartphone.
- With the use of a proprietary Bluetooth stereo transmitter, available from your hearing care provider, get your television audio into your hearing aids directly and in stereo if two aids are used.
- Use Bluetooth accessories, such as remote microphones to hear a person from across a room or across a table (no more than 10-15m away).
- Use smart hearing aid apps on your compatible smartphone to function as an artificial assistant, connect the aid to your smart home, get your phone calls transcribed to text in real time, invoke artificial learning, and much more (not all features available in all devices).

Below is a run-down on different hearing aid manufacturers and what their Bluetooth and direct connectivity technologies can offer you.

It is important to know that many manufacturers offer their Bluetooth and direct connectivity features not just at a premium level, but in ALL levels of hearing aid technology, and now even at the government funded level. This means that Bluetooth is available at different prices of hearing aids.

Some styles such as the smaller Completely-In-The-Canal made for iPhone hearing aids are available from GN Resound, but Invisible-In-The-Canal hearing aids still don't support Bluetooth, nor do most hearing aids running on the smallest size 10 battery. This is likely due to the higher battery drain this feature has associated with it as well as the need for an external antenna as Bluetooth signals cannot travel through the body.

Bluetooth capability is even now becoming available in fully subsidised hearing aids available on the Hearing Services Program to eligible pensioners and veterans.

Even though this technology is fantastic and makes hearing much more enjoyable rather than just practical, it does come with a few issues. It is important to understand that the issues, which are common to Bluetooth, do not interfere with the normal hearing aid functions.

### **Common Bluetooth Issues:**

- It is not unusual for Bluetooth streaming to break up and distort from time to time as it is using a very busy frequency spectrum shared with WiFi that is prone to interruption.
- Smartphone updates often temporarily break Bluetooth functions until the phone manufacturer fixes it again.
- Bluetooth in hearing aids have a limited range of about 10m if there are no walls and no interfering radio signals. This range reduces dramatically if there is a wall or a WiFi system close by.
- Sometimes doing a hard restart (power off and then back on) on your smartphone can fix many Bluetooth issues.
- More often than not the issue is with the phone and not the hearing aid as hearing aids use a standard protocol. Infrequently, the problem may occur due to a hearing aid update.

We offer a wealth of troubleshooting guides on our website and YouTube channel for when you get stuck. Remember, your hearing care professional can assist in many cases, despite not being phone experts.

#### **✓ Buyer's Tip**

**WE HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE BOOKLET ON BLUETOOTH HEARING AIDS ON OUR WEBSITE. THE LINK IS IN THE BACK OF THIS BOOK.**



## 13

# Overview of Hearing Aid Brands in Australia

## Overview of Hearing Aid Brands in Australia

**A**s an independent audiologist, I'm free to recommend any of the high quality hearing aid brands on the market. My sole focus is to give you the best recommendation possible based on your unique needs.

While all the manufacturers are very good, there are going to be brands and models which will better suit your hearing needs better than others.

With the investment you're making in hearing aids, it is important to know what the major brands are so you can make effective comparisons.

These brands are also innovating all the time, so rather than put all the information in this book, I thought we'd start with an overview and some of my observations. Visit the Value Hearing website where different hearing aid models and information is updated as soon as it is released.

These brands are presented in no particular order.

### *Phonak*

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Phonak is a premium Swiss hearing aid company owned by Sonova. Phonak is one of the largest hearing aid manufacturers in the world and has always been at the leading edge of technology especially when it comes to improving a person's ability to hear speech in noise. Their latest chipset, called the Paradise platform, is one of the world's most powerful hearing aid platforms. It delivers exceptional performance in noise and has second-to-none sound quality resulting in fantastic music reproduction. It is also the first truly Bluetooth hearing aid platform compatible with any Bluetooth mobile phone. Phonak is also one of only a handful of suppliers who specialise in hearing aids and other products for more severe hearing loss. Sonova also operates a group of hearing clinics under the ConnectHearing™ brand



### *Oticon*

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Oticon hearing aids is a subsidiary of Demant in Denmark and is undoubtedly one of the largest hearing aid manufacturers in the world, with their own chain of Audika® retail stores throughout Australia and the world. Oticon Hearing aids have won several design awards and are renowned for the comfortable sound quality, sleek appearance and durability. These hearing aids are liked by audiologists and audiometrists as they employ simplified fitting software, making successful hearing aid fittings almost foolproof. Oticon has just released the first hearing aid range with Artificial Intelligence on the chip, which opens some interesting avenues for the hearing aid user.



### *Signia*

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Sivantos has bought Siemens hearing aids and has rebranded as Signia. With Signia, Sivantos starts a new chapter in forward-thinking hearing solutions with expertly engineered devices that are almost invisible, highly automated and adapt to the user's preferences. Signia stands for hearing innovations that are centered on the patient's needs and deliver the highest level of quality and satisfaction. The Signia product portfolio will provide a comprehensive range of advanced hearing solutions with life-changing technologies that welcome hearing aid wears to the colour of sound. They are quick to bring new technology to the market. Recently Signia joined forces with Widex as WS Audiology. Signia shares Widex's retail chains called BloomHearing. Signia is also the contracted supplier for Hearing Australia at this time.



## Widex

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Widex is a Danish hearing aid manufacturer that has led the field in excellent high fidelity sound quality. Their sound quality has become known as Widex sound. And, in the past, clients who were fitted with Widex initially always tended to stick with Widex. This has changed somewhat in recent years, but is still partially true. Widex is one of the few privately owned hearing aid manufacturing companies in the world and even though they initially struggled to keep up with the regular update cycle of the larger manufacturers such as Phonak and Oticon, their latest chipsets can proudly stand next to the giants in the hearing aid industry. Widex has recently joined forces with Signia in the shape of WS Audiology and they distribute their hearing aids via their retail chain called BloomHearing®



## Unitron

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Unitron was originally a Canadian hearing instrument company, which was bought by Sonova, the same company who owns Phonak hearing aids, several years ago. Their research and development is still based in Canada, but their production facility is on the same grounds as Phonak in Switzerland. Unitron has always been a leader in producing great value hearing aids. They generally seem to select the best technologies on the market and package them into a lower cost, well performing hearing aid. In the last few years, they have innovated with their own such as SoundNav and SpeechFocus, which have proven to significantly improve a hearing aid user's hearing in noise. They share the same super-fast chipset with Phonak, so their hearing aids are truly high quality. They tend to only get the latest chipset 6 months after Phonak has it so make sure they have had a recent update before considering. ConnectHearing™ also sells Unitron hearing aids.



Hansaton hearing aids offer the same technology as Unitron hearing aids under another brand name.

## GN Resound

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GN ReSound is among the world's largest manufacturers of hearing aids. Since the company was founded in 1943, ReSound has been known for great sound quality, design excellence and meaningful solutions that help hearing impaired people rediscover sounds. They were the first company to bring made for iPhone hearing aids to the market and have several years of experience in this niche. Their experience has led to one of the most stable direct to iPhone hearing aids currently on the market. They are also the only brand to offer direct to iPhone connectivity in an in-the-canal hearing aid. They have been quickly climbing the ladder and are looking set to take their place in the top 3 hearing aid brands. GN ReSound does not own their own chain of hearing clinics in Australia.



GN ReSound has recently launched the Beltone brand in Australia. It offers the same technology as the ReSound brand, but is exclusively available to the independent market.

## Starkey

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They make the smallest invisible hearing aids on the market. They have good programming flexibility for the clinician, so most can be fine-tuned and have a great range of styles for all kinds of hearing loss. Starkey has rechargeable models, even in-the-ear styles, and is generally considered reliable. They offer direct iPhone connection, artificial intelligence among a long list of features. Starkey owns and operates the iHear chain of clinics in Australia.



## Bernafon

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Bernafon is a Swiss hearing aid company that is part of the Demant group who also owns Oticon and Sonic Innovations. Bernafon offers great technology, such as ChannelFree Processing, which delivers very natural sound quality. In Australia, they are not priced much lower than the premium brand range from Oticon. Bernafon tends to supply the independent market mainly..



## Sonic Innovations

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Sonic Innovations is an American hearing aid company which was bought by Demant in November 2010. Demant also owns Oticon and Bernafon and, through the Sonic Innovations acquisition, obtained several hundred HearingLife® clinics throughout the world. Sonic Innovation's technology development has always focused on producing the best electronic noise reduction algorithms, but due to the company's smaller size, they have not released dramatically new technology for a number of years. Due to the shared technology, Oticon's offerings may offer better value if not priced too differently.



## How are you supposed to know which hearing aid features really matter?

Some features, such as multiple channels, are easy to implement and may look impressive on paper, but in reality don't make much of a difference in the hearing aid's actual performance for the average hearing aid user.

Interestingly, some smaller manufacturers push these "paperweight" features as they tend to lack the technically difficult features that really matter most to user benefit.

You often see multiple channels (32, 64 or even 196) advertised as one of the key features in "cheaper" [online hearing aids](#). These aids are often advertised as premium technology at low prices. In reality, 6 - 8 channels are all you often really need for an optimally performing hearing aid.

Here are the features you should consider having in [your next hearing aid](#) to achieve the best possible benefit available today. I have filtered out all the fluff, as well as the features such as effective feedback management, open fitting, Impulse Noise management, noise reduction, telecoil, electronic wind noise reduction, etc., which are already well established.

I have selected three universally applicable important hearing aid features that can really make a difference to a user's experience.

They are, however, strictly the opinion of the [author](#), who has over 20 years' experience in hearing aid fitting and technology and who has seen the progress of digital hearing aids since their inception.

Note: Your best hearing aid should be chosen not in isolation, but with the guidance of a good hearing specialist. Without this guidance you could end up with [a hearing aid that just does not work well](#).

# The very best hearing aids will benefit from these three important features:

## ***Automatic Directional microphones – For better speech understanding in noise***

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Hearing aids have been able to effectively improve hearing in quiet situations pretty much since their inception. Over the last decade there really hasn't been much difference between different hearing aid models' performance in quiet situations. There are some factors which affect an individual person's ability to hear well with hearing aids, but, overall, most proper hearing aids do a great job of optimising hearing in quiet if fitted professionally.

A much bigger challenge is improving hearing in noise. In this respect, hearing aids have gradually become more effective in separating the speech you want to hear from the speech you don't. Each person's ability to hear in noise is different, so your needs regarding which technology is right for you can only be determined using comprehensive speech in noise testing.

The only proven way to achieve this is through the use of directional microphones. A modern directional microphone system consists of two microphones on each hearing aid. When the directional microphone system is activated, the hearing aid focuses the direction of sound pick-up forward. This means you hear loudest from the direction you are looking at, while sounds next to and behind you are suppressed.

Directional microphones are most effective when they automatically switch when interfering background noise, often other speech, is detected. Manual systems only get it right when the user remembers to push the button to switch modes, which unfortunately does not happen consistently. Automatic systems get it right 90%+ of the time as they are analysing the sound hundreds of times a second.

There are several levels of directionality, listed below in order of complexity from least to most complex.

### **Fixed Directionality**

Does not alter to follow the sound around you. Instead, it picks up the best in front and worst right next to you. Has been available for decades. If you move your head the noise level changes based on the fixed pattern. This is normally available in the lowest levels of hearing aid technology and most often requires manual switching.

### **Adaptive Directionality**

A little smarter in that it follows the one loudest noise behind you as it moves, notching it out. (Many lower-end hearing aids have at least this level of directionality). This first became available around 20 years ago. This technology is often found in automatically switching hearing aids. This level is perfectly suitable if your hearing in noise is only mildly impaired.

### **Multi-Band Directionality**

Follows multiple sound sources behind you, suppressing them even if they move or you move your head. The number of bands range from around 4 up to 48 in some more advanced models. This requires more processing and has been available for the last decade or so. This improves your hearing in noise further and can suit a mild to moderate speech in noise difficulty.

### **Super Directionality (Beam Forming)**

This is the most complex level of Directionality and can offer the best hearing in noise in certain situations like at cocktail parties. Here a hearing aid on one ear wirelessly combines its two microphones with the two on the other ear to form a four-microphone array. This is the latest innovation and has been available in limited brands, first released publicly around 8 years ago.

This provides maximum pickup in a narrow beam in front of the hearing aid user while offering maximum suppression behind the hearing aid user. More modern versions of this can automatically trigger and follow the loud noises behind you.

Super Directionality is only available in limited brands. Super directionality becomes important for moderate to severe signal to noise ratio hearing loss as tested using speech in noise testing.

**Note: Directionality requires hearing aid microphones to be spaced at least 9mm apart to be effective.**

For this reason, it tends to be available only in hearing aids with sufficient space to house the microphones. So as a rule, they are not available in Completely-in-the-Canal (CIC) or Invisible in the Canal (ITC) hearing aids. These small hearing aids tend to compromise functionality for size.

The exception is Signia Silk and CIC, which wirelessly connects the two single microphones in each hearing aid (left and right) to form a directional microphone with two microphones. The directionality is not as good as with two microphones but is better than nothing. I would say it gets close to the performance of a Fixed Directional microphone, but is still far from ideal. This simulated directionality would only suit the mildest of signal to noise ratio hearing losses.

**NOTE: The better a hearing aid's directionality, the more expensive it tends to be. Not everyone requires the most expensive hearing aid with top end directionality to do well however. The only way to know is to undergo a speech in noise test and have your score matched to a hearing aid's performance in noise.**

You can [read more here about improving your hearing in noise](#).

It is also critical you work with the hearing aid to get the most out of its directional microphones. Basically, keep noise to your back and the person you are listening to to your front. We have an article detailing tips and tricks to get the most out of your hearing aids here.

**Update: Oticon has once again altered the way hearing aids work in noise with the introduction of its More range of hearing aids. These hearing aids offer only very basic directionality to emulate the shape of the ear. Instead, they use a brand-new Neural Noise reduction technique using advanced onboard artificial intelligence to analyse a sound scene in real time and focus on sounds that are important to the user. Watch this space as this has the potential to change the way hearing in noise is addressed going forward.**

### **Multi-Base Automatic Switching – for best automatic performance and less need for manual program changes**

This one is likely to cause a bit of controversy as most Hearing Aid brands DON'T offer this feature. The reason for this goes back to the early days of digital hearing aids when it was technically very difficult to create a multi-base automatic hearing aid without some serious performance issues. Most manufacturers chose single base automaticity as the foundation of their digital strategy. A brave few chose the more complex multi-base automatic system as their foundation.

To understand Multi-Base Automaticity, you first need to understand its counterpart, Single-Base Automaticity. Single-Base Automaticity means that the hearing aid, which is essentially





a computer dealing with sound, has a single set of features active for its automatic program based on a few core settings like compression (how it deals with different levels of sound) and frequency response (how it corrects for your hearing at the different pitches).

When an environment is encountered requiring an automatic change, those underlying strategies stay the same, but adaptive features like noise reduction or directionality are increased or decreased.

A big advantage with this approach was that it was relatively easy to do without causing any noticeable switching effects to the end user. The big disadvantage is that if a setting required any underlying changes to the core processing, such as those required for music, then a manual program would need to be used for optimal performance.

Another limitation to the clinician would be that if a client has issues in one situation that is automatically adapted for, eg. background noise, they were left with one of two choices.

They could either change the noise settings and hope that all the other situations will remain acceptable, or they would have to create a manual program to address that single situation. This essentially means that the hearing aid is semi-automatic. More manual programs often means more confusion as the user has to figure out which setting is best for any given situation, which distracts from the conversation you are trying to have at the same time.

Multi-Base Automaticity essentially switches the hearing aid automatically from one set of core features to another (Automatic program switching). So not only can the adaptive features change, but the frequency response and core compression characteristics can change automatically. This approach is much more automatic than single-base systems.

In the past, the biggest disadvantage was that hearing aid users could hear the hearing aid switch from one program to another, which was quite unsettling. With each generation, hearing aids become ever faster and now new strategies, like the blending of programs, gradually got rid of the side effects altogether. Today you can experience smooth transitions with optimal automatic functioning without compromise.

The biggest advantages of modern Multi-Base Automatic hearing aids are that each automatic program can be changed independently of any other. This means, if you have difficulties hearing in noise, the clinician can confidently change only that program without any concern of changes to programs that are working well. The clinician also has very little need to add manual programs, which in turn means less manual fiddling from you, the user.

### **Availability of Multi-Base Automaticity:**

- Phonak (Sonova)
- Unitron (Sonova)
- Hansaton (Post Sonova Acquisition models)

### **Why don't other manufacturers just switch to Multi-Base Automaticity?**

Most manufacturers tend to build on features from their previous generation hearing aids. This means that the next generation of hearing aid has all the features of the previous one PLUS MORE.

As I understand it, to change to a completely new core digital strategy would mean that much of what was done previously would have to be discarded, and they would likely have to start everything from scratch.

They basically have too much to lose as they have to learn or licence what they don't know about making Multi-Base Automaticity work effectively. They also run the risk of alienating the clinicians who are used to the way things have always been done in the past.

Some manufacturers like Siemens (now Signia) have tweaked their Single-Base Automatic system to allow a change to the frequency response and a few other criteria in its automatic settings, which is an improvement on other Single-Base Automatic systems.

They do not however allow the full flexibility of a true Multi-Base automatic system and manual programs are still required at times.



**Update: Real time artificial intelligence on the hearing aid has the potential to change the way hearing aids react to different environments, negating the benefit of Multi-Base Automaticity. We are starting to see applications of this, eg. Oticon's More range of hearing aids.**

### ***Exceptional Sound Quality – Improved speech clarity, better music enjoyment and less distortion in loud environments***

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Digital Hearing aids have always had pretty good sound quality, but over the last 36 months we have seen some impressive advancements in how sound is captured and processed in these miniature computers.

In the past, limitations in size, power usage and processing ability, limited the range of sound input that could be processed in a hearing aid. The limited resources available then were focused on speech audibility at the cost of sound quality.

This is all starting to change, however. Big manufacturers have gradually been updating their hearing aid ranges with much more powerful processing, allowing them to deal with a wider range of incoming sound. This greatly improves their sound quality, especially for music. It also means less distortion in very loud environments.

That covers the top three features I believe one should consider as must haves in your next hearing aid. A combination of the features is better than any single one on its own through.



Saying that, most modern hearing aids are far removed from their older siblings in terms of performance and quality. This is because the chips driving hearing aids are basically computers dedicated to sound.

A 5 year old computer cannot perform as well as a modern computer. The exact same can be said for hearing aids in my opinion.

Beware, there are still plenty of hearing aids sold using old chips delivering sub-optimal sound quality and/or performance. That is also why you should never purchase an older model offered at a lower price. This practice is rife in the industry and is used by large chains such to keep their prices low.

Fortunately, these hearing aids are often rebranded to the retailer's own brand, so it makes it easier to identify. Be wary if you search the brand name and only the retailer's name shows up in results. You also need to understand that not everything out there that is advertised as hearing aids are actually hearing aids.

## The quality difference between various hearing aid technology levels

### **Government level**

- Generally those hearing aids are provided free of charge to pensioners under the Office of Hearing Services Program. There are many hearing aids available in this class of instrument. Some of the models on offer are almost 8 years old, while others are more modern. So, mileage varies very much. Some clinics purposely choose the worst of the bunch to incentivise their pensioners to top-up to more expensive models. I personally choose to work with the best models in this space, so your need to top-up is reduced as much as possible.

### **Essential Level**

- This is the first level of technology. These aids are automatic, but have limited noise reduction capabilities. Despite this limitation, it is still an excellent option for someone with good speech in noise test results.

### **Basic Level**

- This is a step above the Essential level and includes more automatic features and a little more noise reduction

### **Advanced Level**

- This level is generally as good as the previous generation (of the same brand's) Premium level. They generally have pretty good noise reduction, but lack some of the cutting-edge features of the current generation Premium models.

### **Premium Level**

- This is the best that a current manufacturer currently has available. It contains all the top end features. Some manufacturers may have a sub premium and then a premium model with only a few features being slightly different.

## ***Is one technology better quality than another?***

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In essence NO. Although there are certainly quality differences between different hearing aid brands, there is no quality difference between levels.

To clarify, quality in this instance pertains to reliability and the quality of the parts used in the hearing aid.

All hearing aids in a particular manufacturer's range actually use exactly the same parts, chip, speakers, microphone, etc. as any other level in that range. What happens in the factory is that a whole slew of blank slate hearing aids of the exact same quality is produced. One of the steps in the process is then to load software onto that blank slate. The software is what determines the features of the hearing aid, not the hardware parts.

So, an essential level of one manufacturer has the same parts as the premium level. The only difference is that the software on the premium model unlocks a lot more features and performance than found in the essential level.

One manufacturer, Unitron, actually allows users to have their hearing aid technology upgraded to a higher level in the clinic by simply paying an upgrade fee. This is something we hope to see other manufacturers take on board as well.

## ***Are you saying that all manufacturer's hearing aid technology is equal?***

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No, definitely not! Many manufacturers develop their own chips and there are some big differences in capability between these chips. These relate to what is possible with the software, which relates to how well they perform in different situations.

Different manufacturers have a different focus when developing their software. This is discussed under each of the brands.

## ***Technology levels can be abused!***

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Some retailers use technology levels to fool consumers. What they do is assign technology levels such as Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, or Diamond, and then combine that with the Manufacturer's name.

An example would be ReSound Gold or Bernafon Silver.

These tactics make it very difficult for the consumer to price shop as such a product does not exist anywhere outside the retailer making these assignments. Always make sure you know the exact manufacturer model when quoted on hearing aids to avoid being tricked into expensive pricing.

We have caught on to what models fit with which ranges though, so feel free to contact us if you have a hearing aid with such a designation that you want more clarity on.

A newer and more challenging situation is the use of white labeled hearing aids, where it is very difficult for anyone outside the particular clinic to tell what they are actually offering you. These aids can sometimes be out of date or defeatured, meaning you pay less, but also get less.

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# What Should You Expect From The Hearing Specialist Recommendations?

## What Should You Expect From The Hearing Specialist Recommendations?

Once your hearing specialist has completed the hearing assessment, they should make a recommendation based on your results. If hearing instruments are suitable for you, your hearing specialist should use the information from both your test results and your case history, to select a device which best matches:

- Your hearing levels
- Speech understanding in quiet
- Speech understanding in noise
- Lifestyle, and
- Hearing needs

The explanation needs to clearly demonstrate why a certain recommendation has been made.

### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**IF THE CLINICIAN SIMPLY GIVES YOU A LIST OF DEVICES AT DIFFERENT PRICE LEVELS AND EXPECTS YOU TO CHOOSE, YOU NEED TO QUESTION WHY THE CLINICIAN IS NOT MAKING A FIRM AND CONFIDENT RECOMMENDATION. THIS MAY BE A SIGN THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO MAKE A CLEAR SUGGESTION OR THEY ARE NOT CONFIDENT IN WHICH SOLUTION WILL BE BEST.**

Some important things to consider once you have been presented with your options are getting:

- A fair price
- Hearing aid recommendations
- Hearing aid quotes (be aware of the dirty tricks!)
- High quality aftercare

Let's take a look at these four points in depth.

### ***Getting a fair price***

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There is a very wide range of hearing aid prices in the Australian market. Differences of up to \$5000 on exactly the same devices can be found by simply shopping around and making some simple enquiries to different hearing aid clinics.

### ***A note about online bought hearing devices***

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There has recently been some interest in obtaining hearing aids online at discounted prices.

This is usually a poor option, as the level of service involved with this method commonly leads to buyers with a less than ideal outcomes.

You also require regular visits, in person or remotely, to ensure the hearing aids keep up with your changing hearing, and also to address any performance issues in the aids before they become noticeable.

Hearing aids purchased online are often not set as well as those fitted in-person by the professional. Having your hearing properly addressed is critical to your health as the brain loses capacity to deal with sound over time if it is not stimulated properly. (See the section *How Can You Tell If You Have Hearing Loss*).

Additionally, purchasing hearing devices online can mean that you're not purchasing a genuine device, or that it comes with no guarantee, or limited warranty.

While it may seem like an attractive way of saving money initially, it can end up costing you more money long-term, as well as being a negative experience.

### ***When Is A Hearing Aid, Not A Hearing Aid?***

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Not all hearing aids sold online are actually real hearing aids either.

Recent online entrants into Australia are offering pre-programmed hearing aids to “suit most people” for less than \$600 each.

This is complete nonsense. Each person and hearing loss is unique, so even though this may improve your hearing somewhat, it is far from optimal, and may actually cause further noise induced hearing loss over time.

We have an article on these “[fake hearing aids](#)” on our website.

Not all hearing instruments are suitable for all hearing problems, and you need to have the correct style of device chosen.

If you want a discreet, in the ear device, these are made from a mould of your ear. This needs to be done by a hearing specialist.

**Remember, the lowest price does not necessarily mean it is the best value.**

For hearing aids to be set up correctly, you need to be face-to-face with the hearing specialist, as tests should be performed whilst the devices are in your ears.

Other points to consider is the amount of face-to-face after care service available for important fine-tuning after the initial fitting, as well as ongoing after care. You can read more about the risks of purchasing online on our website.

**Hearing devices need to be adjusted as you acclimatise to the sound, or if your hearing changes, so establishing a relationship with a capable local hearing care professional is important.**

### ***Hearing aid recommendations***

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After reviewing and explaining the results from your assessment, your hearing specialist will discuss your hearing aid options with you, if appropriate.

Factors they should take into account will be:

- Your level of motivation
- Your expectations
- Your needs
- Your preference for automatic vs manual hearing aids
- Hearing assessment results
- Speech in noise results, and
- Your lifestyle and budget.

*A hearing aid is simply a small part of the equation in delivering better hearing over a long period.*

Your specialist may discuss one or two different models, but should be able to suggest the option, based on your results discussed with you, they feel will most likely to work best for you.

### Don't assume that it will always be the most expensive hearing aid.

Level of technology should be closely linked to your test performance in noise and in quiet, NOT ONLY to your lifestyle or budget.

#### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**YOUR HEARING SPECIALIST SHOULD EXPLAIN TO YOU EXACTLY WHY THEY FEEL THE HEARING DEVICE OPTIONS PRESENTED ARE THE BEST FOR YOU. IF YOUR SPECIALIST DOESN'T EXPLAIN TO YOU WHY THEY FEEL THE RECOMMENDATION IS THE BEST OPTION FOR YOUR NEEDS, FEEL FREE TO ASK THEM FOR AN EXPLANATION TO ENSURE YOU ARE GETTING WHAT YOU NEED.**

*Ask them what other comparable products are available* from different hearing aid manufacturers.

*Ask them what happens if the first recommendation does not work out.* If your specialist can't offer a range of solutions, it may be that they are limited in the manufacturers that they offer, which in turn limits your choice.

*Never accept a recommendation made simply based on price!* The hearing specialist should be able to clarify why a specific model has been suggested rather than offering you a menu of hearing aids at different price points and expecting you to choose which will be best.

*Is the quote professional?* Does it clearly show the hearing aid model, price, as well as included services and warranties? Don't accept a price simply scribbled on a brochure when it comes to such an important purchase.

**If you are ever pressured to make an immediate decision that makes you feel uncomfortable, then simply walk away.**

**You can do much better than that.**

## Hearing Aid Quotations – The Dirty Tricks Used to Confuse You

#### ✓ Buyer's Tip

**WHEN GIVEN YOUR HEARING DEVICE QUOTE, REQUEST THAT IT HAS THE HEARING AID MANUFACTURER'S NAME AND THE HEARING AID MODEL ON IT. YOU WILL NEED THIS INFORMATION IF YOU WANT TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE GETTING A REASONABLE PRICE.**

Unfortunately, some companies are more concerned about their bottom line than your hearing. There are a few methods some companies will use to discourage you from comparing their prices:

1. *Not providing you with the hearing aid model details on your quote.* Instead, hearing devices might be classified as "Silver Level", "Gold Level", "Platinum Level" or "Diamond Level," which is just a grouping they have given devices in similar price ranges. This makes it harder for you to know what they are actually purchasing, and makes it almost impossible for you to check their specific pricing against competitors. It can be an indication that they may be over-charging for their hearing aids.





- Some companies like to take a **non-refundable** deposit on the hearing aids before they are ordered. This is to discourage people looking around for more competitive prices. If this is insisted upon, you should have a written assurance that you will get a full refund if you change your mind before the fitting.
- 2. Make sure that the company has the longevity to back up their aftercare service. Those offering extended aftercare, extended warranties (all hearing devices in Australia come with a three year manufacturer's warranty) as well as all the other long term add-ons to sweeten the deal, have to at least been in business for as long as the duration of the promised inclusions. All the added extras might seem enticing, but it's important to make sure that the company has the longevity to continue providing these services to you. If not, then these value add may not be worth the paper they are written on.
- 3. A few new and desperate clinics are promising the world, but have not been proven to be sustainable for the period they promise you free services for. An example of this is offering 4 (four) years of included aftercare while they have been in business for less than 2 (two) years! Statistics suggest that 85% of small businesses fail in their first year, while 70% fail in their second year. You don't want to be left out in the cold by promises they can't deliver on.
- 4. On the flip side, some of the larger chains have been known to use scare tactics to explain their higher prices when confronted with lower quotes for the same products from smaller competitors. They may say that the clinic in question won't be around next year, or say things such as they don't offer genuine products sourced from Australia. This is simply to protect their own interests and higher than normal prices. You can always call the hearing aid manufacturer in Australia and ask them if the clinic you are interested in buying your hearing aids from cheaper is an official supplier of their range.
- 5. Selling out of date models cheaply. Some retailers have a range of hearing aids they can sell cheaply as they are previous generation technology. These models do not perform as well as current generation models and will be unrepairable as soon as manufacturers runs out of parts. Large manufacturer chains and big box stores are most commonly guilty of this practice. Once again, you are welcome to contact us for a quote to see if the model recommended is an out-of-date model.



## ***Aftercare services***

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It is important to know what services, consumables and warranties are offered with your hearing devices if you are trying to compare prices between companies. More importantly, is the clinic providing aftercare haphazardly, where *you* have to let *them* know if you have issues? Or do they have a clearly defined client journey?

You can read about a well-defined client journey in an earlier chapter.

The biggest issue with a client-led aftercare process is that many people do not notice as their hearing aid slowly deteriorates in performance. This could result with your expensive hearing aid ending up in a drawer as it isn't working, rather than in your ear. At best, it can lead to a using suboptimal functioning hearing aid for longer than you need to.

Remember, hearing aids work on the brain rather than fixing the ear. Your brain adjusts to what you give it and may lose connection if you aren't properly stimulated.

Consistent aftercare with active recalls is ALL about getting the best possible outcome for *you* over the long term. Unlimited visits without active recalls means very little, as the clinic is hoping you will be like most consumers, and not complain until things have been really bad for a long time or, worse still, simply give up on your hearing aids and not bother calling them.

Appointment time with a clinician is expensive, so active recalls have more value than leaving it up to you to decide when you might need help.

**✓ Buyer's Tip**

**SIX-MONTHLY HEARING INSTRUMENT CHECKS ARE RECOMMENDED AS HEARING DEVICES TEND TO DRIFT SIGNIFICANTLY IN PERFORMANCE WITHOUT REGULAR SERVICING.**

Check if the clinic you are considering has any proactive programs in place to ensure your ongoing satisfaction with your hearing devices.

A six monthly hearing instrument check with the clinician is a good idea at the very least, and your devices can be adjusted at this time if there is any change to the performance or your hearing.

Some clinics offer six monthly over the counter servicing, which is not as beneficial or valuable as six monthly clinical consultations where the hearing aid performance is actually measured.

**Ensure you get the full warranty for your hearing devices or look around for a better deal.**

The standard set by hearing aid manufacturers is typically three years.

This may not always be passed on to you or it may have negotiated down when deals are being brokered between hearing aid clinics and hearing aid manufacturers.

Some companies also offer a quantity of batteries, consumables or hearing device drying kits.

Take all of this into consideration when deciding how client-focussed the hearing aid clinic is and when comparing prices.

*One year warranty = around \$150 per aid in value.*

**✓ Buyer's Tip**

**CHECK TO SEE IF THE HEARING AID RETAILER NOTIFIES YOU IN ADVANCE WHEN YOUR WARRANTY IS ABOUT TO EXPIRE. THIS ADDS TREMENDOUS VALUE AS YOU ARE THEN ABLE TO GET YOUR HEARING AIDS SERVICED BY THE MANUFACTURER JUST BEFORE THE WARRANTY EXPIRES. WHEN A HEARING AID IS SERVICED, MANUFACTURERS FREQUENTLY REPLACE MUCH OF THE ELECTRONICS. THEY ALSO TEND TO GIVE ADDITIONAL WARRANTY ON THE REPAIR.**

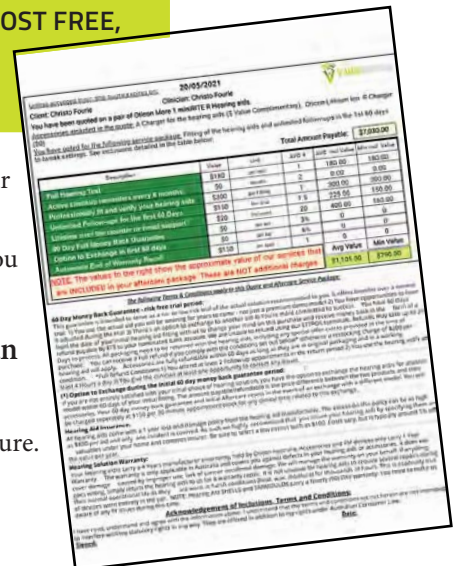
**THIS COULD MEAN ADDITIONAL YEARS OF TROUBLE FREE, AND COST FREE, BENEFIT FROM YOUR HEARING AIDS AFTER THE WARRANTY HAS EXPIRED.**

Another great aftercare service is the availability of loan hearing aids if your hearing aids ever go back to the manufacturer for service.

Check to see if your chosen provider offers this valuable service, so that you aren't left without your ears for weeks at a time, when they require repair.

**Make sure that whatever is promised is written down in an agreement and make sure you have a copy.**

This means you have proof of what was promised if any issues present in the future.



## ***Return or exchange periods***

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Most companies will offer a return period on any device you purchase to give you peace of mind that the hearing aids you have purchased are going to do the job for you.

This is usually a 30 day period where you can return your purchased hearing aids or try another model device if you feel your initial choice is not meeting your hearing needs. A longer return or exchange period is generally better as it allows you more time to fully adjust to the hearing aid.

### **✓ Buyer's Tip**

**A LONGER FULL MONEY BACK GUARANTEE IS A BETTER OPTION THAN A SHORT TERM PARTIAL MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.**

**Ask your hearing specialist what their return policy is.**

**This should also be written on your quote or hearing aid purchase receipt.**

**Make sure you are aware of any fees involved in exchanges or returns as these can be substantial.**

## ***Trials vs Money back***

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You're likely familiar with the ads you've seen in newspapers, magazines, radio and perhaps even as a flyer shoved in your letter box:

***Free Hearing Aid Trials!  
We need 25 people to trial the latest hearing aid technology!  
Blah! Blah! Blah!***

Free hearing aid trials are used prolifically in the hearing aid industry to attract new clients. The reason they are used so much is that they work extremely well for the clinics involved in them.

They work for a few reasons:

1. Clients believe they are a good way to test drive a hearing aid and are happy to receive a free sample.
2. Once clients receive something for free, they feel they owe the giving clinic something in return. That something is very often a purchase. This is called reciprocity and is often used in sales and marketing to influence clients.
3. Clients believe the outcome they receive in the trial will be the same outcome they receive in real life – which is not completely true in many cases.

## ***Okay, so where is the problem with free trials?***

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All in all, free hearing aid trials seem like a really good idea that appears to serve both client and clinic well. So why would this be a problem?

There are quite a few potential problems with free trials if you dig a little deeper:

- Free trials are often offered for only a week or two. However, it takes your brain way more than that to adjust sufficiently for you to experience the final benefit. So you are basically making a decision based on the honeymoon period, which does not always relate to the long term outcome.

- Hearing aids used in free trials are, more often than not, the most expensive, top range of the brand you are trialling. So either you have to purchase the top end model to get a similar outcome as with the trial, or you might be disappointed with the real world outcome of the lower level model you have chosen.
- When a hearing aid is fitted for the free trial, typically the 'first fit' setting is used. 'First fit' settings are designed to give the best initial impression without really representing the long term settings they really need for best performance in the long term.
- With free trials you are often limited to the devices the clinician has demonstrators for. These are predominantly over the ear devices. So there is a chance you do not end up with your ideal solution or the right style of hearing aid based on limited trial options.
- You might actually decide against hearing aids even though you could have benefitted as the trial normally does not allow for fine tuning adjustments.
- You might not be fully committed to give the hearing aids a proper go as you have not "skin in the game". "It's free so maybe I don't need to try and get the best out of it" is an attitude that could lead to failure.



### ***Okay, so if a free trial is not the ideal solution, what is?***

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You don't just want to buy hearing aids and hope for the best!

- Make sure the trial is with the hearing aid you will end up purchasing. If at all possible, it should be set the way it would be if you had bought it. Many clinics won't do this as they are trusting you with very expensive stock which costs money to return to the supplier. We tend to offer these trials only to clients who have purchased from us before and are looking to upgrade.
- You could purchase the actual hearing aids that have been recommended to you and make sure you have a decent money back guarantee attached. A 60 day money back guarantee is ideal, as it allows sufficient time for your brain to adjust properly to the devices and this also allows for follow-up appointments to further fine tune the hearing aids to your unique situation.
- This way you end up with the exact model and style recommended, from the ideal brand, fitted and followed-up properly. On top of that you will know what the long-term benefit might look like once you have passed the initial honeymoon period.
- Restocking costs may apply in case of return, but this also motivates you to give it a fair trial, which inevitably is about improving your quality of life in the long term.

#### **To summarize:**

- Be wary of free trials unless it is the exact style and model you were looking to purchase, fitted properly.
- Consider a money back period over a free trial, as the long term benefits outweigh the potential costs.

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# Hearing Aid Funding in Australia

# Hearing Aid Funding in Australia

Below is an overview of the most common ways of helping to fund hearing aids in Australia.

## ***Hearing Services Program (HSP)***

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The Australian Government Hearing Services Program is managed by the Hearing Services Program (HSP). Eligible individuals are able to access [a range of hearing services](#) through the HSP voucher system.

These services are typically available to Centrelink pensioners, some veterans and their dependents.

Services include:

- Hearing assessments
- A range of fully subsidised basic hearing aids (or assistive listening devices)
- Ongoing support and maintenance (including battery supply), which may incur an annual fee.

Individuals under the HSP program also have the option to 'top-up' (pay out of their own pocket) in order to receive devices with additional features that are not fully-subsidised under the program.

If an individual is [eligible](#), they can [apply online](#) to receive their voucher. This can then be taken to their choice of HSP provider in order to receive services.

Self-funded retirees and working individuals usually do not qualify.

## ***Veterans (DVA) and Current ADF Personnel***

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Veterans with a DVA Gold Card or White Card (Hearing Specific), as well as current members of the ADF, are also eligible to receive services under the OHS system (outlined above).

Eligible individuals can apply online to receive their voucher.

DVA does not appear to currently pay for top-up hearing aids. Individuals who choose a device that is not fully subsidised under the program will need to pay the difference.

## ***Accessing Superannuation Early***

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Those who have difficulties paying for hearing aids may be eligible to access their superannuation to cover the cost. Some policies may not allow early access, therefore it is recommended to speak to the Super Fund before initiating this process.

Individuals can apply through the personal details section of their Centrelink online account, found through [myGov](#).

To access super early, applicants will need to provide at least:

- A recent (less than 6 months old) report from your audiologist
- A quote/unpaid invoice to determine the required amount to pay for the hearing aids.





## ***Payment Plans/Financing through the hearing care provider***

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Some hearing aid retailers provide financing options to their clients. There are both interest free and interest bearing financing available.

Interest-free payment plans are popular, but they can charge very high merchant fees (10% + in some cases) to the retailer. This means that providers offering these, often have to inflate their prices to be able to offer these plans.

You also need to consider whether they require an upfront part payment or just monthly costs. Are there any hidden fees you need to consider? Do you actually need such an expensive hearing aid, especially if it was recommended without speech in party noise testing being conducted?

## ***Personal Loans***

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Some people choose to take out a personal loan in order to finance their hearing aids. Personal loans will incur interest so it may be beneficial to use a comparison website (such as infochoice or finder) to find the total cost.

There are companies out there which specialise in loans for medical expenses. Again, these will usually incur interest so it pays to shop around.

The advantage of a personal loan is that it spreads the cost of hearing aids across months (or years), rather than having to pay a lump sum upfront. Personal loans can often offer interest rates lower than those associated with some hearing aid retailers.



## ***Interest-Free (or Low-Interest) Credit Cards***

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While some credit cards have high interest rates, others (particularly new cards) may offer an interest-free (or low-interest) period. For those able to pay off the cost of the hearing aids within this time-frame, paying by credit card may be a better alternative to a personal loan.

As with personal loans, it is advisable to research the available options and to use comparison sites, in order to determine which card is best suited to the individual's situation.

## ***National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)***

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The NDIS is a program designed to support Australians under the age of 65 with a permanent and significant disability. This support includes funding 'assistive technology' such as hearing aids.

As the program is currently being rolled out across Australia, it is not yet available in all areas of the country.

After checking their eligibility for the program, applicants can contact the NDIS on 1800 800 110 to ask for an Access Request Form.

Applicants may be asked for supporting evidence of their hearing loss, and hearing needs, which an audiologist should be able to provide.

The Scheme is still in its infancy and there are many wrinkles to still iron out. Many providers are not yet registered to provide services under NDIS, so clients who are eligible have a great deal of difficulty finding services who accept NDIS.

## ***Tax Rebates***

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In recent years, individuals have had the ability to claim an [offset](#) for the net expense of their hearing aids. This is income tested and the ATO provides a [calculator](#) to help with this.



It is important to note that tax rules can change from year to year, and as a result, eligibility may change from year to year. When in doubt it is advisable to ask a qualified tax expert as to what is claimable.

### ***Private Health Insurance***

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Individuals who purchase hearing aids may be eligible to receive a rebate through their Private Health Fund. Private Health cover will vary across policies, so it is important to speak to your provider in order to determine your entitlements.

Private Health funds will often have limits as to how much, and how often, people can claim for hearing aids. You generally need to be seen by a registered hearing care provider to be eligible to claim.

### ***Workers Compensation***

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Those who feel that their hearing loss is a result of their employment may wish to investigate the possibility of compensation. Each state varies in terms of what level of hearing loss is compensable, and those unsure should speak to their state's regulatory body.

If accepted, an individual may receive compensation in the form of hearing aids, or a lump sum. It is important to determine if compensation is a one-off event or a periodic entitlement.

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# Hearing Aid Fitting Appointments

## Hearing aid fitting appointments

When it is time for you to actually get your new hearing aids, they need to be precisely fitted and programmed to your particular hearing levels. This will involve the hearing specialist connecting the hearing devices to their computer and doing some testing of the sound levels in your ear canals. Some clinicians skip some important steps, like [real ear measurements](#), which leaves your brain without critical stimulation.

**Ideally, clinicians will explain this process to you and show you the results of the testing done.**

**You should see your hearing target levels and a close match by the hearing instrument response levels.**

Following this testing, the specialist will ask you questions about the sound quality and make adjustments according to your comments. You should also be shown how to use and clean the devices at your fitting appointment.

There should be a discussion on how best to start using your hearing devices.

Some people will be okay to wear them all day directly following the fitting, while others may have to incrementally increase their usage during the first few weeks.

I personally see the best results when the hearing aid is initially set to levels that are comfortable for you. This allows you to wear the hearing aid all day long, while experiencing immediate benefit without being overwhelmed. This helps establish habits quickly and also gets your brain stimulated early on. We can then tweak the hearing aid up as you get used to wearing it.

The way it used to be done was to set the hearing aid to maximum correction. You as the user then needed to gradually wear the aid more until you get used to this. This method often leads to feeling overwhelmed, a series of additional appointments, and more frequent rejection.



**The hearing specialist should also discuss with you what to expect as you adjust to wearing hearing aids. Keeping in mind that the average person waits eight years before purchasing hearing devices, it will take time to adjust to hearing certain sounds again.**

Your first follow up appointment should be scheduled for about seven to 21 days post fitting. There should be no limit to the number of follow up appointments allowed, as this is imperative in determining if your hearing devices are achieving the ideal result. Follow-up adjustments should typically settle within the first 60 days.

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# Getting Used To Wearing Hearing Aids

## Getting used to wearing hearing aids

**A**s we covered in an earlier chapter, there are two vital factors in how we hear - the ear itself and the brain. And it doesn't matter whether you're new to wearing hearing aids, or have been wearing them for years - your brain needs time to adjust.

Unfortunately this doesn't get explained to many new hearing aid wearers and this contributes to the reported 1-in-3 people who don't wear the hearing aids prescribed.

A hearing clinic can increase the likelihood of client hearing aid success by focusing on the all-important follow-up processes and letting clients know what to expect from their hearing aids.

To help maximise your success, I want to talk about four key factors:

- Participation
- Preparation
- Practice, and
- Patience

### ***Participation***

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As I wrote in the introduction to this book, you won't get the best out of your hearing aid if the choice to wear them is not 100% yours.

We see clients at our clinic who are only there because they've been nagged into it by other family members. Not surprisingly, these are often the people who do not give their best effort in working with their hearing aids. It also makes it easy for them to find excuses as to why the hearing aids "don't work" for them.

The truth is unavoidable - it does take time to get used to hearing aids.

Initially, you will be conscious of physically wearing them - in the same way you feel conscious of wearing spectacles for the first time.

Then you'll become conscious of all the sounds you can now hear. Sometimes that too can be overwhelming as the brain works out what to do about all this new sensory input.

So, the number one thing you can do to make hearing aids work for you is to make sure you are an active participant in your hearing journey. You'll find it is a most empowering experience.

Of course, your hearing specialist is there to help you when you get stuck or need a bit of encouragement.

### ***Preparation***

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Most clients will adapt very quickly to their hearing aids, for some it can take weeks and for others as long as four months to get used to wearing them.

So be prepared for some changes in your life, but if you work through them, you'll find the change is very much for the better.

There is something very important to know about hearing aids.

Unlike spectacles, which can often deliver perfect vision in many cases, hearing devices will



help you maximise your hearing but it cannot give you “20-20” hearing. The reason for this is that spectacles correct a lens issue. Hearing aids deal with brain issues and damaged nerves in the ear.

Being prepared for the fact that the hearing aid cannot fully restore loss, and appreciating that the device is working to maximise your hearing potential, will help you avoid unrealistic expectations.

And finally, be prepared to make a few adjustments to your daily routine to get the best from your hearing aids and to help keep them in excellent working order.

It's important to work in partnership with your family and your hearing specialist to help make the most from your new devices.

## **Practice**

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This is possibly the most important of the ‘four Ps’:

- Practice handling
- Practice wearing
- Practice hearing
- Practice maintenance



**Practice handling your hearing aids.** The more you are familiar with them, the more confident you will feel about wearing them.

If your hearing aids use batteries for instance, become familiar with opening the battery door, then taking out and reinstalling the batteries until you can manage the process with confidence.

This is no easy task for people with reduced dexterity and we encourage family members to be supportive and affirming during this phase.

Even though they look fragile, hearing aids are actually remarkably tough. Even if you do manage to break something, your hearing specialist should be able to fix it for you. So don't let this worry you.

**Practice wearing your hearing aids.** All of that new sensory input can be overwhelming at first, so wear your hearing aids for as long as you can, ideally for at least 8-10 hours a day.

Some clinicians will set the volume of hearing aids on the high side to give their clients the ‘wow’ factor. I, however, prefer to err on the side of setting the hearing aid at a lower initial volume to help you to quickly become more familiar with sounds you've been missing.

One useful tip is to practice wearing hearing aids in quiet conditions (such as at home) to get used to the hearing ‘new’ sounds without having to cope with too much noise, as you would find in a shopping centre or a noisy restaurant.

**Practice hearing.** Now it's time for some ‘brain training’.

One great activity is to go to your local park, sit down on the park bench and close your eyes. Concentrate on one type of sound - the sound of a bird in the trees, a dog barking, the rustling of the leaves, the sound of children playing on the swings, the tick-tick-tick of the wheels of a bicycle as it goes by. That will help you to isolate sounds and correctly identify them.

It will also help you learn to filter out general background noises that you can now hear, but don't need to pay close attention to.

**Practice having conversations** both one-on-one and in small groups. Having new hearing aids is a great opportunity to more deeply connect with friends and loved ones again through conversation.

Turn down the TV volume to what other people in your household consider to be ‘normal’ levels and practice listening. Television news and talk shows are excellent to start with, as the volume and the cadence of speech tend to be consistent during the length of the program.



If you need to, consider using closed captioning and subtitles until your brain gets used to processing and interpreting the signals it's receiving. If you still have difficulty, many hearing aids have optional TV connectors, to dramatically improve your TV listening.

Another technique is to read aloud to gauge a sense of a suitable speaking volume.

Some people find it useful to keep a daily diary of experiences with a new hearing aid. Jot down your notes and observations. Be as detailed as possible and then review the evening before your first follow up visit with your hearing specialist to see if those early observations still hold true.

You might find that sounds you found difficult to process, like annoying background noise, or your voice sounding too loud, is less of an issue after several weeks of working with your hearing aids.

Bring your notes with you to share with your audiologist for that first post-fitting appointment as adjustments to the devices can be made at your visit.

### ***Practice Maintenance***

This is a topic all of its own and you'll find it in the next chapter.

## ***Patience***

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They say patience is a virtue, and nowhere is that more true than when it comes to wearing hearing aids.

There is a lot for the brain and the body to process, so don't be too disheartened if you find yourself initially struggling.

One side effect clients report to us is feeling tired after first wearing hearing aids - and it's no surprise! Your brain is having to do a lot more work to receive, process, analyse and interpret all the new sounds you're hearing. That consumes a lot of energy.

Let your family and friends know to be patient with you during this time. I have a useful article here on hearing your best in difficult situations which has some advice for yourself and your loved ones on how they can assist you.

Practice, patience and perseverance will reward you with maximised hearing.

## ***Hearing Aid and Communication Tactics for Hearing in Noise:***

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- Communication will always be optimal with the person sitting immediately next you, increasing distance will prove to be quite challenging (even for someone with normal hearing).
- If possible make sure you have your back to the noise source. Most modern hearing aids are automatic, when in a noisy environment the hearing aid becomes more directional (forward focusing).
- If possible put the hearing aid into its directional program.
- As a last resort, reduce the overall volume of the hearing aid. This will only improve comfort, and will invariably reduce overall speech understanding in noise.

## 18

# Maintenance and Care of Your Hearing Aids

# Maintenance and Care of Your Hearing Aids

## **Overview**

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Hearing aids are a modern miniature technological marvel. Like all sophisticated pieces of equipment, they need regular care and maintenance to keep them operating at peak efficiency.

There are two main parts of any hearing aid that need daily attention: the microphone (where the sound enters the hearing aid), and the receiver/speaker (where the amplified sound is delivered to your ear).

With daily wear, these ports can become blocked with wax, oil or debris. If that happens, the hearing aid will not deliver optimum performance.

The easiest way to ensure your hearing aids remain in tip-top condition is to make care and cleaning a daily habit.

## **Daily Detail**

In the evening: Before going to bed, remove your hearing aids and open the battery door to disconnect the batteries (if it operated using cell batteries). Remember to keep them in their case to avoid them being lost. In the case of rechargeables, place your hearing aids in their charger overnight. That means the batteries will be at full strength at the start of the day. They are designed so that you cannot overcharge them. Check that the indicator lights on the hearing aids or charger case are on to ensure proper seating.

In the morning: Use the cleaning brush provided in your kit to remove wax which can accumulate around the microphone and receiver (don't forget that many hearing aids have two microphones). Wax hardens overnight, making it easier to brush away in the morning.

Brush downwards to help the loosened wax to fall away from the microphones.

Use the supplied cleaning cloth to wipe away any dirt or debris.

## **Weekly Detail**

Each week, give your hearing aids a little extra TLC in the cleaning department.

The external casings of your hearing aid may need to be cleaned with a wax pick or a wire loop to gently remove any stubborn deposits. Exercise caution when using the pick around the microphone or receiver ports!

Not all hearing aids are the same. Each specific style of device requires specific cleaning. If you need any assistance with your hearing aids, contact your hearing care professional.

## **Specific devices**

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### **Mini Receiver In The Ear/Receiver In The Ear (mRITE/RITE)**

These hearing aids have a receiver/speaker that sits in your ear. At the end of the tube is an ear dome. This will need replacing from time to time, along with the white filter which sits beneath it.

To clean the dome, use a wax pick to clear out the holes at the tip of the dome. Do not stick anything longer into the speaker/receiver port, as it can damage the components. Replace the wax filter if needed.

To replace the filter, use the pen-like tool provided with your cleaning kit to remove the filter and use the other end to insert a new filter and then replace the dome.



If the dome gets fully blocked or becomes misshapen, replace the dome as required. You should have a supply that came with your hearing aids.

Wipe the outside of the hearing aid with soft cloth.

✓ **Buyer's Tip**

**HAVE A DEDICATED MICROFIBRE CLOTH FOR CLEANING YOUR HEARING AIDS.**

### **Behind The Ear (BTE)**

Behind the Ear models also have a tube but do not have the domes. Once you have removed the tubing from the hearing aid, use a vent cleaner to clear out the tubing and vent.

Use the small loop at the end of the wax brush to pick debris away from the sound outlet.

Brush over the microphone ports to remove any loose wax or debris. Then wipe the outside of the hearing aid with soft cloth.



✓ **Buyer's Tip**

**USE A BULB BLOWER TO FORCE THE WATER OUT OF THE TUBING TO PROMOTE QUICKER DRYING.**

### **Custom Hearing Aids (ITE, ITC, CIC, IIC)**

Brush over the microphone and speaker ports to remove any loose wax. Any stubborn spots of wax can be dealt with using a wax pick that comes with your cleaning kit.

Be extremely cautious around the microphone and speaker ports as incorrect use can damage the components inside.

Pay special attention to the hearing aid vent. Use a vent cleaner to ensure the vent is kept clear.

✓ **Buyer's Tip**

**STORE YOUR HEARING AID OVERNIGHT IN ITS DEHUMIDIFIER TO KEEP IT DRY.**

### ***Additional Tips***

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**Table Talk** - When cleaning your hearing aids, place a hand towel on the surface you're working at. This protects your hearing aids if they are accidentally dropped. Also, don't forget to remove your hearing aids and put them in their case whenever you're going to the beach, planning to cool off in the pool, or going to the hairdressers. Mishaps with hearing aids can be very expensive.

**Coming Clean** - Make sure your hands are clean and dry before cleaning your hearing aids. Also, give your designated cleaning cloth a regular wash to ensure you're not redepositing debris back onto your hearing aids.

**Daily Does It** - Make cleaning hearing aids a regular part of your daily routine. When it becomes a habit, you're less likely to forget about it and you can maximise years of trouble-free hearing.

**Use The Right Tools For The Job** - Use the cleaning kit provided with your hearing aid and don't improvise. Using water, cleaning fluids and solvents may cause damage, as can using anything other than the wax pick and loop provided to clean microphone and speaker ports.

## ***Stay In Touch***

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I recommend keeping to a six-monthly checkup (don't worry, we'll remind you). Your hearing specialist will take a look at your hearing aids and help ensure they're operating at peak efficiency.

If you need some additional help, you'll find it in our [easy to follow troubleshooting video guide](#).

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# Travel & Your Hearing Aids



## Travel and Your Hearing Aids

The sky's the limit when you have your best possible hearing. And one of the questions I'm regularly asked is how to successfully travel with hearing aids – especially if you're planning to fly to your destination.

If travel is in your plans, we have some helpful tips to make sure you can make the most of your adventures abroad.

### ***Make a packing list***

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Conduct a review of tubing, audio shoes, domes, batteries, and other accessories that you use on a regular basis. Do you have enough to last through your trip and a couple of spares, just to be sure?

We recommend giving your clinic a call a few weeks prior to departure to ensure essential consumables arrive in plenty in time.

While you're talking to your hearing care professional, let them know you're heading overseas, they may be able to tell you who to contact locally, should you need assistance.

Pack your old working hearing aids as a spare. Bringing them with you will provide peace of mind should you lose your current pair.

Another essential for your list is to pack remote or wireless accessories to give you the option of connecting your hearing aids to FM and loop systems.



An increasing number of airports are installing loop systems to assist people with hearing loss hear important announcements. Even those with perfect hearing will complain that airport announcements are difficult to understand.

Make sure you keep an eye on the departure board and sign up for SMS/text message notifications from your airline to stay up to date.

### ***About Batteries***

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Take extra batteries when you travel.

If you're using rechargeable hearing aids, make sure you add the charger to your pack. Mobile phone charger battery packs (also known as powerbanks), available from places like JB Hi-Fi

and Officeworks, are a handy accessory if you're not sure how long it might be before you can get to mains power. An international power adapter is also an essential must-have.

Keep spare batteries in your carry-on luggage just in case your flight is delayed. Hearing aid batteries are allowed onboard flights.

Speak to your travel insurer about specifically itemising hearing aids in your coverage in the event of loss or damage.

To further protect your hearing aids, make sure you bring your case. For additional protection, keep the case in a ziplock plastic bag. This will protect the case (and your hearing aids!) from the risk of damage should a container leak in your baggage). Placing the hearing aid case in a pair of socks or folded up in clothing will also protect it from knocks and jostles.

## ***At Security***

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You don't need to remove your hearing aid to go through security checkpoints but it is well worth letting security officers know you are wearing aids, and have batteries and chargers in your carry-on luggage.

## ***On the flight***

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If you find yourself seated in an exit row, do let your flight attendant know. Passengers seated in these rows are required to assist flight attendants in the event of an emergency. Generally, anyone with any sort of disability, or who are traveling with children, are not seated in exit rows.

You don't need to switch your hearing aid off during takeoff – indeed, it's important to listen to the safety procedures! But if your hearing aid has any type of connectivity, you will need to switch them to flight mode when instructed by the flight attendant.

On long haul flights, preserve your batteries by switching them off when you're ready to sleep. If you're using rechargeables, take advantage of the USB port typically found on the entertainment console on the back of the seat in front of you to recharge your hearing aids while you sleep.

## ***At your destination***

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Holiday at the beach? Be sure to pack your hearing aid dehumidifier or dryer.

Take advantage of any FM and loop systems at the hotel or concert venues to make the most of your holiday experience.

Make sure you put away your hearing aid case in a secure location when you are not in your room. Unfortunately, small attractive cases, like the ones hearing aids come in, can be a target for thieves.

We also have some great tips on how to get the most from your hearing aids – [especially in large gatherings](#).

## 20

Work with your Hearing Aids,  
not Against Them

## Work with your Hearing Aids, not Against Them

**H**earing aids are very capable devices, but they also have limitations. Understanding these limitations can dramatically improve your hearing with them.

### ***Position yourself to hear best***

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- Hearing aids have a maximum pick up range of about seven (7) metres in quiet, which reduces to about 1 ½ to two (2) metres in noise. Make sure you are not too far from the people you are most likely to want to speak with.
- When hearing aids enter their noise setting, they tend to pick up better in front, than behind you. So ensure that the majority of the noise is behind you and as little as possible noise is in front of you. Keep the person you want to hear in front of you.
- Consider room acoustics. Sound bounces off walls, so don't face a wall unless you are at least three (3) metres away from it and AVOID corners.
- Carpeted rooms will be MUCH better for you than uncarpeted ones. Even a strategically placed rug can make all the difference. Experiment before your guests arrive, by having a radio on and listening to the changes in volume as you move around.
- Make sure there is sufficient lighting to see the other people's lips. Even without lipreading training, you can gain an extra 40% or so understanding by looking at someone's lips as they speak.

### ***Take Control***

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- Turning the hearing aid volume up is sometimes counter-productive. Your brain will have difficulty comprehending speech if it is overwhelmed. You can often improve hearing in noise, but turning your aids down a bit, rather than up. Experiment.
- If your hearing aid is the manual type, make sure to switch to the noise program when appropriate. Remember to switch back to the all around program when the noise drops, otherwise you'll have trouble hearing over distances.
- Be assertive and ask for clarification if you were not confident in what you heard. It is better to ask than to reply inappropriately.
- Turn down any background music or move away from it. For every two (2) metres you are away from a sound source, the volume drops by half.
- Make sure you have a bit of a rest before engaging in a social situation. Hearing loss is tiring and you will have more energy to "listen" if you are well rested.

### ***Ask others for help***

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Your significant others can also help you enjoy family gatherings more. If you are wearing your hearing aids consistently and ensuring they are working optimally, then they will most likely be willing to help you fill in the gaps without resentment.

Hearing with hearing loss, even with the best hearing aids, still requires a great deal of effort. This is not the kind of effort most people can keep up for very long. People with normal hearing don't often understand this as their hearing is "effortless". If they don't believe you, show them this guide and tell them I said so!

## ***What they can do to help you hear better:***

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### **Call your attention before speaking to you**

By simply calling your name or tapping you on the shoulder before speaking, they can avoid having to constantly repeat themselves. This simple act gives you time to switch your attention and actively listen.

### **Face me when you speak to me**

As mentioned above, lipreading can add up to 40% more information to speech. So this is an easy win for you both. They might need a bit of reminding as this is not how we normally speak, especially with someone we are comfortable with.

### **Don't speak from another room**

Two things make this difficult. Hearing aids can only pick up speech from around seven (7) metres away and speech drops by half for every two metres it travels. So if they are serious about you hearing what is being said, they'll need to take this into consideration.

### **Don't cover your mouth when speaking to me**

This one again comes down to lip reading. If you cover your mouth, then I can't lip read.

### **Don't repeat; rephrase**

Repeating something that is misheard can help, but a much better approach is to rephrase. Use different words to convey the same message. This gives you much more context and redundancy, and dramatically increases the possibility that the message will be heard accurately.

### **Don't Shout**

Speaking louder is helpful if you were whispering before, but shouting is counterproductive. Hearing aids can make soft sounds louder, but they also make loud sounds softer to protect the ear from further damage.

When a person shouts at you, this could bring the aid into saturation, which can distort the speech in order to protect your hearing.

### **Slow down**

Rapid speech is very hard to understand even with normal hearing. With hearing loss, it is a hundred times harder. By the time you have figured out what was said in the first sentence, the speaker might be on the third and the whole message is lost.

Don't try slowing down your speech by dragging your words. Simply put a slight pause between sentences. You'll notice an immediate improvement.

### **Make subject changes a bit more obvious**

Fluid conversation can switch between topics quite rapidly. This is fine for people with normal hearing as there is so much redundancy available that we can quickly switch topics quickly.

With hearing loss, even when using hearing aids, redundancy falls away. So it is very easy to still think in terms of the old topic if a theme has switched, particularly if the switch was subtle or you were momentarily distracted.

Your significant others can help by making it more obvious that you are talking about another topic.

### **Make others aware of your loss and your needs**

Sometimes you simply have to tell others that you have a hearing loss. It is helpful if they know you are really interested in what they are saying, but you need some help. The best things they can do is face you when they speak, put slightly longer pauses between their words and don't shout.

### **Be my hearing buddy**

All these tricks are not enough for some. In that case a significant other can act as a hearing buddy, simply rephrasing what others have said in a clear way, so you can hear them well. The hearing buddy is best placed where you can hear them well and see their lips clearly as in the tips above. They can also alert you when the theme has changed and get your attention when someone else wants to involve you in conversation.



21

# What You Need To Know About Hearing Aid Insurance

# What You Need To Know About Hearing Aid Insurance

*My rabbit ate my hearing aid...*

*Well, I was eating cashews in bed while watching something on TV. I took my hearing aid out and the next thing you know...*

**D**on't worry, your hearing care provider has likely heard it all. They can quickly get you refitted with new hearing aids to make sure you're hearing as well as you possibly can. But that still doesn't remove the costly sting of having to replace an expensive set of devices, so we hope you're reading this before something happens to your hearing aids.

## ***An Ounce of Prevention Is Better Than a Pound of Cure***

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Keep your hearing aid case with you. If you have to take your hearing aids out for any reason, make sure they go straight into their case for safekeeping.

Hearing aids placed into handbags can easily find themselves lost. The same thing can happen when they're dropped in pockets. We've been told by clients about how their hearing aid accidentally found its way into a load of washing!

While I recommend regularly cleaning your hearing aids - the washing machine is definitely not what I mean!

Establishing the habit of keeping hearing aids in their case, when they're not in your ears, also prevents the heart-pounding panic when you can't find them when you do need them.

But mishaps will happen, so we recommend insurance for peace of mind.

## ***Manufacturer Insurance***

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You don't want to be hunting for your hearing aids!

In addition to the performance warranty of three years on hearing devices, many manufacturers also include a one year loss and damage warranty as well.

Be sure you read the terms and conditions because, like all insurance, there are limitations and exclusions.

There will also be an excess payable on a replacement hearing aid, but it will be substantially less than the cost of buying a replacement at full cost.

## ***Contents Insurance***

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Check with your insurance company as hearing aid replacements, in the case of loss or theft, may be included in your home contents insurance. But don't assume that it is!

Even when hearing aids are included, your insurer may have specific qualifications on when they will make a pay out. Other insurers may require you to specifically list hearing aids as a separate item on your insurance policy.

What you may not know is insurers may demand that you go to their preferred provider to have the aids replaced and fitted. When you add hearing aids to your household insurance, also make sure they are covered for travel or loss away from home.



If you value freedom of choice, you can ask your current hearing care professional to provide a quote to give to the insurance company for consideration. If the insurance company insists that you see their provider, you are not at all obliged to stay with that provider following the fitment and set up.

### ***Travel Insurance***

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When travelling, bring a backup set of working hearing aids with you and double check your insurance covers hearing aid replacement.

### ***For Pension or Veteran Card Holders***

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If you received your hearing aid under the Federal Government's Hearing Services Program, you will receive a financial contribution towards replacement hearing aids if they are lost.

You will need to require a Statutory Declaration and detail how your hearing aids were lost.

Fully subsidised hearing aids will require a small payment for the replacement. However, if you made a top-up payment for hearing aids over and above those supplied, there will be a higher fee.

### ***And What About The Dog? (Or Rabbit)***

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In-the-ear hearing aids are perfectly snack-sized for curious pooches, so keep hearing aids above 'cruising height' of pets.

If you fear your pet has swallowed one of your hearing aids, get them to the vet as soon as you can. Swallowing a hearing aid with its battery could be very dangerous.

Pets and hearing aids don't mix...

Symptoms to watch for are:

- Drooling
- Oral pain
- Pawing at the mouth
- Vomiting
- Decreased appetite
- Difficulty swallowing
- Burns in the mouth
- Abdominal pain
- Fever



A vet will be able to perform an x-ray for additional peace of mind.

And a reminder – expired batteries can still cause harm, so make sure you effectively dispose of spent batteries.

Ultimately, the best insurance is doing your very best to make sure your hearing aids are well cared for and thoughtfully treated.



## 22

# Further Reading

## Further Reading

**M**y blog on my company (Value Hearing) website is a continually updated source of information on hearing aids, hearing loss and getting the best out of your hearing. You are welcome to sign up to our weekly newsletter if you would like to be kept up to date with the latest information on hearing, the industry and on hearing aids in general.

We also have a growing Youtube channel with regular new hearing aid reviews, usage and other hearing related videos. [Subscribe today to stay in the loop.](#)

### ***Hearing Aid Basics:***

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#### How do Hearing Aids work?

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/how-do-hearing-aids-work/>



#### Which Types of Hearing Aids are Best?

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/which-types-of-hearing-aids-are-best/>



What to expect from from Hearing aids as a first time user

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/what-to-expect-from-hearing-aids-if-youve-never-worn-them-before/>



Can Hearing Aids cause further hearing loss?

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/can-hearing-aids-cause-further-hearing-loss-as-it-makes-things-louder/>



Do I need one hearing aid or two?

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/two-ears-better-one-hearing-professionals-recommend-two-hearing-aids/>





## *Choosing a hearing aid*

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### Hearing aid Myths

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/9-myths-hearing-aids-even-clinicians-believe-true/>



### Which hearing aid is best for me?

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/choosing-a-hearing-aid-that-will-work-best-for-you/>



### Reasons why your hearing aid might not work in noise

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/discreetly-improving-hearing-noise/>



**Choosing a hearing aid that will work for me in noise**

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/why-cant-i-hear-speech-in-a-noisy-environment/>



**Is an invisible hearing aid better?**

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/the-pros-and-cons-of-very-small-hearing-aids-in-your-ears/>



**Hearing aids for when you have one “dead” ear (CROS)**

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/modern-solutions-single-sided-deafness-crosbicros/>



### Hearing Aids for Tinnitus

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/tinnitus-and-hearing-aids/>



### Ultimate Guide To Tinnitus

<https://www.valuehearing.com.au/ultimate-guide-to-tinnitus>



### ***Upgrading Your Current Hearing Aids:***

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How to make sure your next hearing aid is much better than the last

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/ensure-your-next-hearing-aid-is-better-than-your-last/>





What has changed in hearing aids over the last 4-5 years

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/11-things-that-have-changed-about-hearing-aids-last-5-years/>



### *Getting the Most out of your hearing aids*

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How to Improve TV listening with Hearing aids

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/improve-tv-listening-hearing-aids/>



Managing Ear Wax

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/ear-wax-friend-foe/>



### Handling of Hearing Aid Batteries

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/everything-need-know-hearing-aid-batteries/>



### Hearing Aid Troubleshooting Guides

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/hearing-aid-troubleshooting/>



### How To Hear Your Best In Difficult Situations

<https://valuehearing.com.au/news/hear-your-best-in-difficult-situations/>



**Getting the most benefit out of your hearing aids -  
Guide**

[https://valuehearing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/  
Getting the Most Out of Hearing Aids Guide-1.pdf](https://valuehearing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Getting_the_Most_Out_of_Hearing_Aids_Guide-1.pdf)



***Other Guides, Checklists and Books:***

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**6 Step Checklist to finding your ideal solution**

<https://lp.valuehearing.com.au/checklist>



**Value Hearing's Tinnitus Self Help Guide**

[www.valuehearing.com.au/ultimate-guide-to-tinnitus](http://www.valuehearing.com.au/ultimate-guide-to-tinnitus)



### The cost of Untreated Hearing Loss

[www.valuehearing.com.au/guide-to-hearing-loss](http://www.valuehearing.com.au/guide-to-hearing-loss)



### *Additional Resources:*

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#### Hearing Tracker

<https://www.hearingtracker.com/>



#### Soundfair

<https://soundfair.org.au/>





**Better Hearing**

<https://betterhearing.org/>



**Value Hearing YouTube Channel**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCelsdQnxkiqy13L1mU9BxA>

