

Factors to consider

What should you think about when buying hearing aids? All other things aside, your hearing aid must be a good match for your lifestyle and hearing loss characteristics, fit comfortably and be adjustable, either manually or automatically. As you read through the information below, list your most important priorities so you can discuss them with your hearing professional.

Lifestyle

Consider your life, work, free-time activities. What are the things you do that are most affected by hearing loss? What are the things, if any, that you're not able to do because of a hearing loss? Define your needs and set priorities. Your job may also be a factor. If you work outdoors in the elements or travel frequently, and are concerned about a hearing aid's durability, you may want to consider a back-up instrument.



Hearing Loss characteristics

The nature and severity of your hearing loss will play a large role in determining which hearing aids are ultimately recommended to you. Your hearing professional can help you understand your unique hearing loss characteristics, and explain the models that would best suit your lifestyle needs.



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Selecting
the Hearing
Instrument
that's Right for You



The four types of hearing aids

There are four basic types of hearing aids. All four will help with mild to moderate losses, but if loss is more severe, choices can be more limited. While size is the most obvious difference, each style has distinctive attributes that are important to consider.

Hearing aids worn behind-the-ear or in-the-ear can carry more sophisticated technology and more powerful amplifiers; they are also more durable. In contrast, new smaller models reside closer to the eardrum, and that proximity to the inner ear can help deliver a more natural sound quality. Your hearing professional will provide you with a recommendation and rationale that's based on your specific lifestyle needs and the physiology of your ear.



Behind-the-Ear

Behind-the-ear (BTE) aids have a plastic housing for the components which rests behind the ear. A clear plastic tube funnels amplified sound into an earmold in the ear canal. This model, though developed decades ago, can be every bit as sophisticated as smaller hearing aids. In fact, it can hold more circuitry and amplify sounds to a greater degree than in-the-ear types. BTE aids can be more durable than other types and a few are even waterproof.



In-the-Ear

In-the-ear (ITE) aids house componentry in a custom-formed shell that fits within the outer portion of the ear. Its size and easy-to-use controls also may be helpful for those with limited manual dexterity.



In-the-Canal

In-the-canal (ITC) aids are smaller still, with a custom shell that fits down into the ear canal, and a smaller portion facing out into the outer ear. They are discreet, yet still visible within the outer ear.



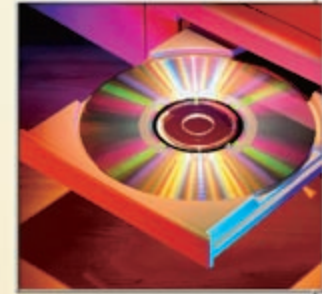
Completely-in-the-Canal

The newest generation of hearing aids are those that fit completely-in-the-canal (CIC). Barely visible—and then only if someone's peering into your ear—the only clue to their existence is the head of a tiny plastic line with which you place or remove the aid. CICs are popular for their aesthetic appeal, but the physiology of some individuals' ears (i.e., a very narrow or small ear canal) may make this style unsuitable for them.



Why Digital Hearing Technology?

Why does music from a CD sound more crisp, clear, and distortion-free than music from a record or tape? The answer, at least in part, is the difference between analog and digital sound processing.



Digital hearing aids have one or more microchip processors inside them that convert analog sound waves into the zeros and ones of computer language. Sound in this format can be processed more quickly and efficiently; in fact, incoming sounds are sampled at a rate of a million times per second. Digital circuitry analyzes these sound levels and frequencies, manipulating them to provide a more efficient match to your hearing profile.

For example, a person with a hearing loss may have trouble hearing soft sounds, but when some sounds are amplified even a small amount, they become uncomfortably loud. Digital hearing aids stratify incoming sounds, detect those that need amplification from those that don't, and process the sounds accordingly.

Consult your hearing professional to help assess the level of technical sophistication you need based on your hearing loss and lifestyle needs.

