

The Savvy Hearing Aid Consumer

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Agenda

- Prevalence, Symptoms and Causes of Hearing Loss
- Impact of Hearing Loss
- Ten Tips for the Savvy Hearing Aid Consumer
- Finding Support
- When Hearing Aids Aren't Enough {Cochlear Implants}
- Audience Questions & Answers

What is your favorite sound? What sound would you miss the most if you could no longer hear?

Hearing loss is a major public health issue and is the third most common physical condition after arthritis and heart disease.

Prevalence of Hearing Loss

- More than half of the people with hearing loss are younger than age 65
- At age 65, one in three people have a hearing loss
- About 37 million people in the in the US have some degree of hearing loss {ranging from slight hearing loss to total deafness}
- 60% of people with hearing loss are in the work force or educational settings
- Less than 25% of people who could benefit from hearing aids actually use them

Signs & Symptoms of Hearing Loss

- Difficulty hearing in noisy environments
- People seem to “mumble” all of the time
- Family, friends, and colleagues often have to repeat themselves
- Difficulty hearing people when they are not facing you or are in another room
- Trouble following conversations
- Ringing, buzzing or hissing sounds in the ears
- Family members and close friends may be aware of the hearing loss before the individual experiencing it

Causes of Hearing Loss

- Earwax build up or foreign objects in ear canal
- Head injury or trauma to the ear
- Ear infection
- Ruptured eardrum
- Conditions affecting the middle or inner ear
- In adults, noise exposure and aging are most common causes
- Sudden, noise-induced hearing loss from gunfire and explosions is the number one disability caused by combat in our current wars

Impact of Hearing Loss

- Isolation and withdrawal from social, family and public gatherings
- Feelings of anger, stress, embarrassment, depression, and frustration
- Others may perceive the person with a hearing loss as aloof, confused, or experiencing a personality change
- In older people, a hearing loss may be confused with or complicated by dementia
- **EVERYONE** in the communication loop is impacted by hearing loss

Savvy Consumer Tip #1

Don't Go It Alone: Bring a Loved One



Savvy Consumer Tip #2

Shop for the Provider

- Audiologists are the primary health care professionals who evaluate, diagnose, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children
- Audiologists are state-licensed and have a masters degree or doctorate in audiology
- ASHA and AAA (American Academy of Audiologists) have online listings of audiologists)
- Hearing Instrument Specialists go through a training program and an apprenticeship to become state licensed to dispense hearing aids

Savvy Consumer Tip #3

Think About Expectations and Priorities

- What do you want the hearing aid to do for you?
- Do you want to hear television better?
- Do you want to hear the sermon at church better or be more confident at work meetings?
- Are you struggling on the telephone?
- Do you want to enjoy dining out in restaurants and be able to hear the conversation better?
- Do you want to hear your grandchildren better?

Savvy Consumer Tip #4 Have Your Hearing Evaluated

- Hearing evaluation should take place in a sound proof booth
- Evaluation should include testing for tones and word understanding
- Test results and recommendations should be discussed in understandable terms following testing in an unhurried fashion
- Accurate test results are needed to program digital hearing aids specifically to your needs

Savvy Consumer Tip #5 Count the Cost

- Be aware digital hearing aid technologies come in basically three product classes (entry level, advanced mid-level, and high-end or premium technologies)
- Depending on lifestyle and communication demands, a mid-level or even entry level may be perfectly adequate for your needs if you stay home a lot or entertain at home
- High-end or premium devices may be worth the extra investment for very active lifestyles or busy professionals
- In short, buy the best you can comfortably afford but avoid technology “overkill” with add on features

Savvy Consumer Tip #6

Ask Good Questions

- Is there a separate fitting fee?
- How long is the trial period?
- Can I exchange the style of hearing aid if I am not comfortable with my first choice?
- Do you sell a wide range of products and styles?
- How often can I come in for adjustments?
- What are the hours for appointments?
- May I get a copy of my hearing evaluation for my records?

Savvy Consumer Tip #7

Recognize Benefits of Digital Amplification

- The majority of hearing aids dispensed to today are highly sophisticated, digital, programmable and customizable in many ways
- Many digital hearing aids have the ability to wirelessly connect to cell phones, land line phones, and televisions
- The goals of digital amplification are both clarity and comfort of speech in quiet and noisy situations

Savvy Consumer Tip #8 Telecoils Make a Difference

- Telecoils create an electromagnetic field between the hearing aid and the landline telephone
- The telecoil can be automatic or may be accessed by pressing a button or switch
- Telecoils can significantly assist with improving understanding on the telephone
- Telecoils can also help in rooms that are “looped” for meetings and deliver the sound directly to the listener’s ear

Savvy Consumer Tip #9

Understand the Contract

- Understand the costs of the hearing aid
- Be sure you take advantage of the trial period {typically 30 to 45 days}
- Clarify the terms of the warranty coverage {repair, loss, accidental damage, and theft}
- Inquire if extended warranty may be purchased
- Understand about nonrefundable professional fees if the aids are returned during the trial period
- Keep a copy of the contract in a safe place

Savvy Consumer Tip #10

Save on Batteries

- Batteries are an ongoing cost consideration
- Costco and Sam's Wholesale Clubs
- Check Sunday paper for coupons {buy one, get one half price type offers}
- Check online for battery wholesale pricing

Finding Emotional Support & Online Resources

- Local HLAA meetings monthly on Monday evenings from September-May
- National HLAA conventions
- HLAA website and consumer forums
<http://hearingloss.org/>
- Healthy Hearing
<http://www.healthyhearing.com/>

Finding Funding Support for Adults

- Veterans should always check first for eligibility through the VA Hospital
- Vocational Rehabilitation for working adults
- The Lions Club International
- Hear Now {The Starkey Foundation}
- United Way Partnerships
- Sertoma Clubs
- Check HLAA and Better Hearing Institute websites for state and federal assistance information
- Recycled or donated hearing aids
- Don't forget about planning ahead with a Flexible Spending Account if offered by your employer

When Hearing Aids Aren't Enough: Cochlear Implants



Cochlear Implant Considerations

- Candidacy: When hearing aids no longer provide enough benefit to hear in noisy places, on the phone or even in quiet conversations
- Unlike hearing aids which simply amplify sounds, cochlear implants use state-of-the-art technology to make sound clearer and easier to understand
- Cochlear implants bypass the damaged part of the inner ear and send sound signals directly to the hearing nerve and up to the brain
- All or most of the costs typically covered by Medicare, Medicaid and third-party insurance

Questions & Answers

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