

Buying Hearing Aids (What to expect)

Audiologists and Hearing Aid Dispensers (sometimes called Hearing Instrument Specialists) are licensed to fit and sell hearing aids in New Mexico. Both are trained in testing hearing and in fitting and adjusting today's hearing aids. Audiologists have either a masters or doctoral degree in audiology and are also trained to interpret test results from a medical perspective and to use additional testing to determine the need for medical treatment. Dispensers are trained to recognize problems that require referral to either a medical doctor or an audiologist but they are fully qualified to fit and adjust your hearing aids. You may also ask your primary care provider or people you know who have had experience buying hearing aids for their recommendations.

THE HEARING EVALUATION

A screening or hearing exam -Hearing screenings are quick pass/fail tests to find out if you need a full hearing evaluation. Hearing exams (assessments) determine the degree of hearing loss, the type of hearing loss, and the configuration of hearing loss and are conducted in a soundproof booth and must be conducted prior to your being fitted with hearing aids. A hearing exam will include testing your comprehension of spoken words.

Your audiogram -The audiogram is a graph that displays the results of the hearing exam. Pure tone audiometry is used to obtain hearing thresholds (softest level heard) at different pitches and the thresholds are represented on the audiogram for the right ear and the left ear. If the exam reveals a hearing loss, the threshold results determine the degree, type, and configuration of the hearing loss. The audiogram also typically displays the results from speech audiometry testing. This consists of speech threshold testing-the softest level at which speech can be understood and speech recognition testing which measures how well speech is understood. Speech audiometry provides important information in addition to pure tone audiometry.

Your type of hearing loss - Your provider should explain which of the three types of hearing loss you have:

Sensorineural Hearing Loss occurs when the hearing organ, the Cochlea, and/or the auditory nerve is damaged or malfunctions so it is unable to accurately send the electrical information to the brain. Sensorineural Hearing Loss is almost always permanent.

Conductive Hearing Loss occurs when there is a problem with the Outer or Middle Ear which interferes with the passing sound to the Inner Ear. It can be caused by such things as too much earwax, an infection in the ear, a punctured eardrum, a fluid build-up, or abnormal bone growth in the Middle Ear such as Otosclerosis. It is more common in children and indigenous populations.

Mixed Hearing Loss occurs when both Conductive Hearing Loss and Sensorineural Hearing Loss are present. The sensorineural component is permanent, while the conductive component can be either permanent or temporary.

What the hearing care provider will review with you

- The results of the hearing examination displayed on the audiogram
- Why you sometimes can "hear" but not "understand"
- If you are a hearing aid candidate and expectations from hearing aid use
- Your life style and how hearing loss affects your daily life

It is beneficial to bring a significant other to the hearing evaluation.

HEARING AID SELECTION

Based on your hearing test results, the interview about life style and expectations for hearing, personal preferences (e.g. invisible) and your budget, your hearing healthcare provider will suggest hearing aids that will suit you best.

Types of hearing aids - There are several styles of hearing aids hearing aids available including behind-the-ear, open fit, in-the-ear and

completely-in-the-ear. There are different options and benefits to each style. Your preference for a particular style is an important factor in deciding which hearing aids to be fit with.

Features - What features are available can vary depending on the style and, among others, will include:

- Directional microphones that focus on sounds in front of you
- Telecoils that allow the hearing aids to connect wirelessly to various devices
- Bluetooth® technology that allows hearing aids to connect wirelessly to various devices
- Remote controls
- Special settings for listening to music, to reduce background noise, and others
- Rechargeable batteries

In office trial - Providers may (when possible) offer you the opportunity to try on and experience how a hearing aid feels and sounds before purchase.

DISPENSING

Fitting - When your new hearing aids are ready, your provider will show you:

- How to place the hearing aids correctly in or behind your ears
- How to access different programs (called memories) in the hearing aids that have been customized for your lifestyle.
- How to use the remote control or streaming device (if there is one)
- How to install and charge batteries
- How to clean, store and care for your hearing aids

Trial period – In New Mexico, a minimum of 45 days after purchase is allowed for you to try out your hearing aids before the sale becomes final. Some offices of as many as 90 days.

COUNSELING AT TIME OF DISPENSING

In addition to instructions on hearing aid operation, you should be given counseling on:

- How to deal with the buildup of ear wax in your ears and on your hearing aids
- How to best adjust to hearing sounds in your environment
- Strategies that will help you hear better in various settings and when to use the programs that have been selected for you
- Encouragement to come back in for more adjustments and fine tuning to fit your needs after you've tried them
- Services available to you from state agencies and other organizations
- What support groups are available locally or at the national level

FOR YOUR PROTECTION

SALES CONTRACT - When you purchase hearing aids, state law requires that you receive a contract that contains, among other things, the make and model of the hearing aids sold, full financial terms of the sale, and a trial period of at least 45 days.

RETURNING YOUR HEARING AIDS - State law also requires that if you return the hearing aids during the mandated trial period, you must be given a refund within 30 days of the return date less any "agreed-upon charges and fees as specified in the written contract."

COMPLAINTS – In the unlikely event that you are unhappy with your hearing aids or your hearing care provider and are unable to reconcile your differences, you can file a complaint on line with the New Mexico Attorney General's office at www.NMAG.gov or call toll free: 1-844-255-9210. Any complaint must be against the individual provider and not the company for which he/she works.