A hand is shown holding a small, black, rectangular hearing aid device. A thin, clear tube is attached to the top of the device, leading to a small, white, cylindrical earpiece. The background is a solid, vibrant orange color. The text 'HEARING & CARE' is overlaid in the center in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'A GUIDE TO HEARING LOSS AND HEARING AIDS' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

# HEARING & CARE

A GUIDE TO HEARING LOSS AND HEARING AIDS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **PART 1 • Hearing & Hearing Loss**

1.1	Introduction	04
1.2	How We Hear	07
1.3	Types of Hearing Loss	09
1.4	Degree of Hearing Loss	11
1.5	Signs of Hearing Loss	13
1.6	What Should You Do?	14

## **PART 2 • Hearing Aids**

2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	Types of Hearing Aids	17
2.3	In-the-Ear Styles	19
2.4	Behind-the-Ear Styles	20
2.5	Choosing a Hearing Aid	22
2.6	Why Two is Better Than One	24
2.7	What to Expect	25
2.8	Getting Hearing Aids	26

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PART 1

# HEARING & HEARING LOSS

Your hearing health is important. With this guide we can help you learn about hearing loss and what options you have if you decide hearing aids are the right choice for you.

**H**ave you noticed we take hearing health for granted when everything is normal? However, when people do encounter hearing loss, they often experience a wide range of associated conditions – all of which contribute to a diminished quality of life. It's true: you don't know what you've got until it's gone. This is especially true of hearing health. It's something most of us take for granted.

If you recognize your eyesight isn't what it used to be, you visit an eye doctor, have your vision tested and get a pair of glasses.

It doesn't seem to work that way when we suspect hearing loss. Instead of taking steps to address the loss of hearing, we use compensation strategies, such as turning up the TV or radio.

We're willing to "live with it." We settle for less than life has to offer. We don't hear the birds twittering, the whisper of a child or the soft passages of our favorite concerto or rock ballad.

### **And that's sad.**

It's sad because we don't have to lead a less-fulfilling life. We don't have to allow hearing loss to diminish our capacity to learn, to perform on the job, to be a part of the family or to take us out of the game. Yet, many of us continue to find ways to adapt to hearing loss rather than confronting the situation pro-actively.

However, you've made a good start. You're reading about hearing loss and hearing loss treatments. The more you know about hearing loss, the better-informed advocate for hearing health you become.

So, discover this miracle of nature – healthy, full, rich hearing. Discover the incredibly complex, yet delicate, mechanism that enables us to hear. Most importantly, learn about the latest treatments available for hearing loss and how you can stay connected to the sounds in your life.

### **What is All That Ringing?**

Tinnitus, also known as ringing of the ears, is a common symptom to co-exist with hearing loss. Tinnitus may be described as ringing, buzzing, hissing or other noise that is heard in the ear. Tinnitus is not a disease, but is instead a symptom of an underlying condition of the ear, hearing nerve or elsewhere. Treating a hearing loss, either by medical management or with hearing aids, may offer relief from tinnitus. A comprehensive hearing evaluation is an important first step in evaluating and managing tinnitus.

### **Most of us know someone affected by hearing loss, considering the recent statistics:**

- Approximately **10 percent** of all Americans experience some degree of hearing loss. That's over 30 million men, women and children.
- Today we're more likely to be exposed to loud noise than at any other time in history. Noise-induced hearing loss can be prevented by taking simple preventative steps.
- Hearing loss affects more than the individual. It affects family members, co-workers, friends and neighbors. Most of us who do experience loss of hearing don't recognize the impact it has on those around us.
- Audiologists and other hearing professionals are seeing younger and younger patients. Hearing loss can occur at any time in our lives.
- Only **25 percent** of those who would benefit from hearing aids wear them. That means the remaining **75 percent** choose not to treat their hearing loss.
- Hearing loss impacts personal relationships, learning skills, workplace performance, self-image and emotional well-being. It's not just about hearing. It's about quality of life.



## TREATMENT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF HEARING LOSS

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Our ears are amazing and our hearing is one of our most incredible senses. We depend on it every day. *But how does it work?*

It's Saturday morning. You're sound asleep, when all of a sudden your neighbor starts mowing his lawn. The sound produced by the lawn mower wakes you from your sleep and maybe annoys you.

**A lot.**

Despite your displeasure of your neighbor's early morning yard work, you've experienced one of nature's marvels. You heard a sound.

**Here's what happened:**

First, you're sound asleep when your neighbor pulls the cord that starts the engine of his lawn mower. When the engine fires up it creates a series of vibrations that move through the air like ripples in a pond.

These sound vibrations eventually reach your outer ear (*see Ear Diagram figure 1.1*), called the pinna. The pinna is the part of the ear we see when we look in the mirror. The primary function of the pinna is to act as a catcher's mitt for the sound waves moving through the air and funnel those waves down the ear canal.

At the end of the ear canal is the eardrum, also called the tympanic membrane. The sound waves hit the eardrum, causing the eardrum to vibrate in perfect synchronization with the sound waves.

In turn, the eardrum transfers its vibrations to which then start to vibrate also. The eardrum and these small bones make up the middle ear (*see Ear Diagram figure 1.1*).

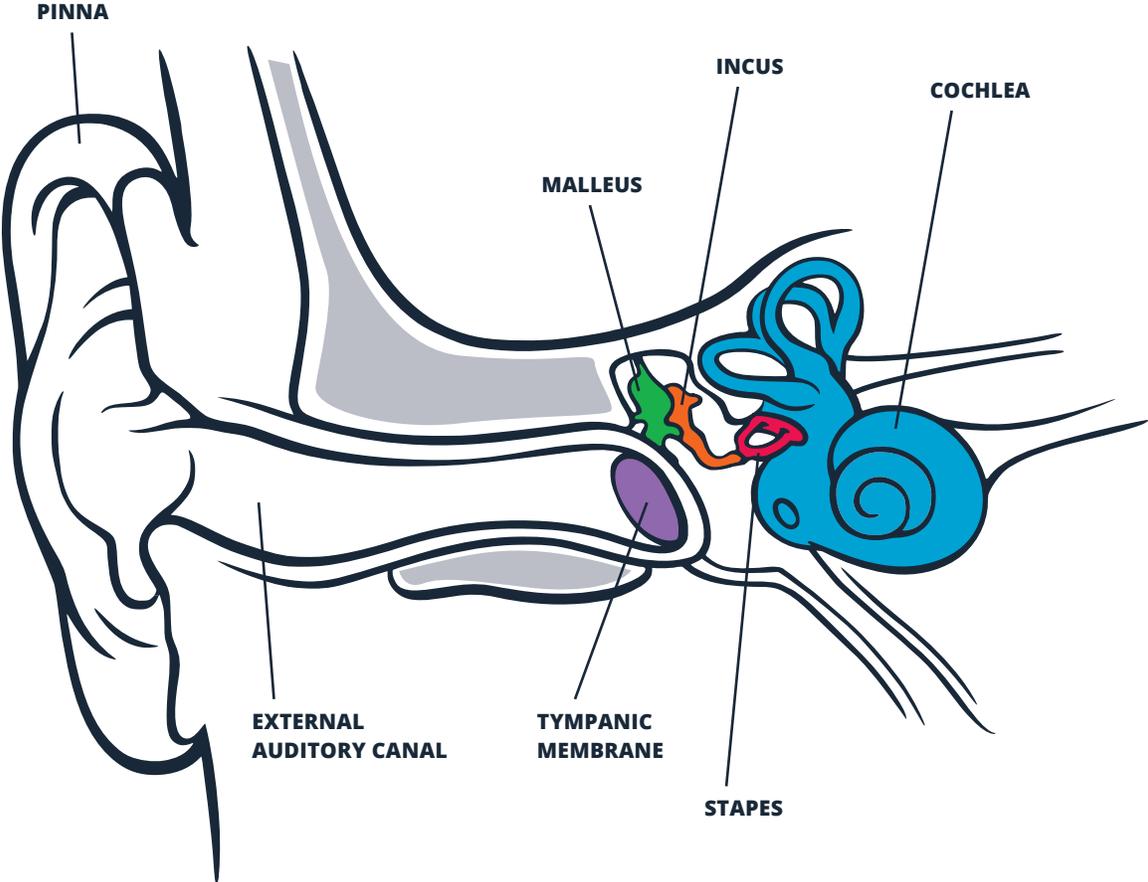
The three tiny middle ear bones transmit their vibrations to a snail-shaped organ called the cochlea, located in the inner ear which is deep within the skull (*see Ear Diagram figure 1.1*). The cochlea is filled with a liquid. The cochlea's inner walls are lined with millions of tiny hair-like projections that wave back and forth in this cochlear fluid.

When the cochlea picks up vibrations from the three small bones, the fluid inside the cochlea vibrates in rhythm. These vibrations agitate the cochlear fluid, which creates waves that are picked up by the hair-like projections that line the cochlea. The hair-like projections convert the vibrations into a series of electrical impulses that are then sent to the brain through the nervous system.

In the brain, hearing centers are activated by these electrical impulses and sound is finally heard and understood.

It's an amazing journey, made all the more amazing because that entire process – from starting the mower's engine until you open your sleepy eyes – takes place in the blink of an eye.

# EAR DIAGRAM



Hearing loss can be categorized into three unique categories. These hearing loss types range from minor hearing loss to severe.

## **Conductive Hearing Loss**

Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound passing through the outer and/or middle ear is disrupted. Some examples of these disruptions include excessive earwax in the ear canal, damage to the eardrum (by cotton swabs or other means), fluid buildup in the middle ear with or without infection, and disease of the middle ear bones, such as otosclerosis.

Depending on the cause of the conductive hearing loss, other symptoms, such as ear pain, drainage from the ears, or a feeling of pressure or blockage in the ears, may occur.

Approximately 10 percent of all hearing losses are conductive, which can range from mild to moderate in severity. Conductive hearing loss can often be medically treated, and, in many cases, hearing can be restored.

## **Sensorineural Hearing Loss**

Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when a problem exists in the inner ear of the hearing system. Sensorineural hearing loss is the most common type of hearing loss. Roughly 90 percent of hearing aid wearers have sensorineural hearing loss.

The most common causes of sensorineural hearing loss are noise exposure, genetics and problems with the hearing nerve.

Sensorineural hearing loss is permanent, and currently there is no cure. The best treatment option for this type of hearing loss is to be fit with hearing aids. For persons with complete, or profound, sensorineural hearing loss, cochlear implants may also be an option.

## **Mixed Hearing Loss**

Mixed hearing loss can occur when both conductive and sensorineural hearing conditions are present.



### **HEARING & KIDS**

Hearing loss can affect people of all ages





Approximately **10 percent** of all Americans experience some degree of hearing loss.

That's over 30 million men, women and children.



Your hearing care professional can accurately measure your personal degree of hearing loss so you can receive the right treatment.

## Hearing Loss Can Affect Everyone in Different Ways

Just as you can have different amounts of vision loss, you can have different degrees of hearing loss, ranging from mild to profound.

In addition, your hearing is measured across a range of pitches from low to high. And your degree of hearing loss can vary across pitches.

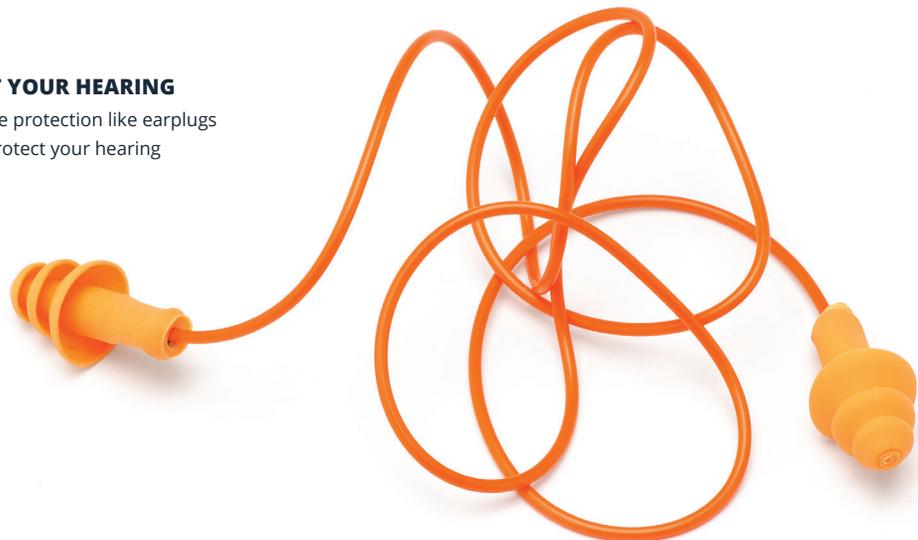
For example, you may have increased hearing loss in the high pitches with minimal loss or normal hearing in the low pitches. In fact, this is the most common configuration of hearing loss and is why you often can hear but can't always understand what people are saying, since you are missing high-pitched speech sounds.

The degree of hearing loss is based on the audiometric thresholds that are measured during a comprehensive hearing test. Hearing is tested for low, middle, and high pitches for both the right and left ears and is plotted on a graph called an audiogram. *(An example of an audiogram and degrees of hearing loss can be seen in figure 1.2)* The degrees of hearing loss vary from mild to severe and profound. Your hearing professional will discuss the degrees of hearing loss across pitches in more depth with you following your hearing evaluation.

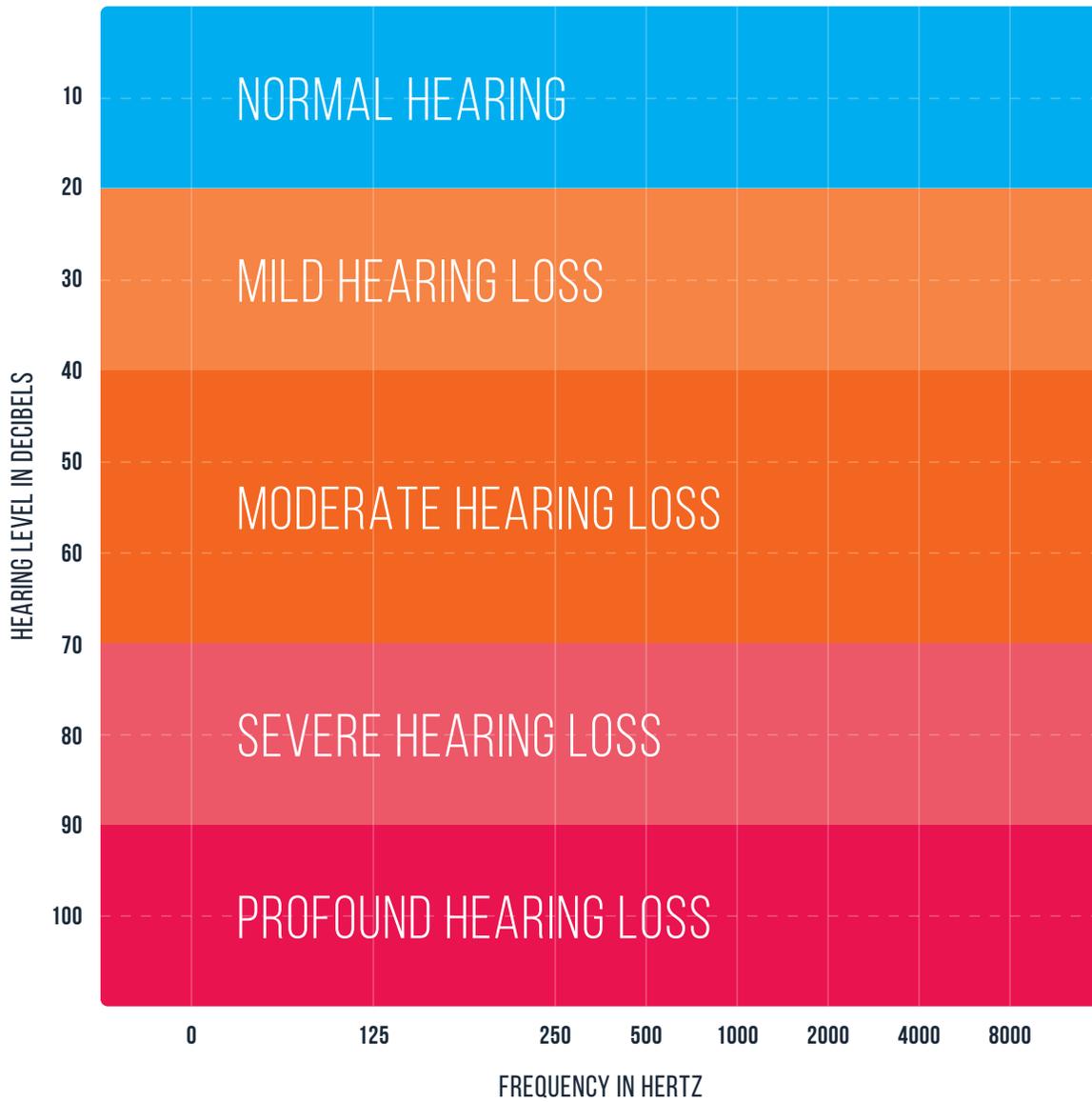


### PROTECT YOUR HEARING

Inexpensive protection like earplugs can help protect your hearing



# AUDIOGRAM EXAMPLE



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What do you do when you suspect you may be suffering from hearing loss?

## **Accepting Hearing Loss isn't Easy, and Many of Us are in Denial**

But the volume dial on the TV doesn't lie. Each time you turn up the volume on the TV or car stereo, you're seeing measurable evidence of hearing loss.

Understanding the signs of hearing loss is an important first step in knowing when to seek treatment for hearing loss. contains a list of questions that represent common signs of hearing loss. If you answer "yes" to any of them, it may be time to make an appointment to see a hearing professional for a full hearing evaluation. Studies have shown that the sooner a hearing loss is treated, the more successful the outcome.

## **See a Hearing Professional**

As soon as you recognize that your ability to hear is compromised, make an appointment with a hearing professional to have a full hearing evaluation. This is the first step towards better hearing and the sooner you take steps to address hearing loss the better.

### **Why?**

Studies have shown our hearing nerves are like any other part of the body – use it or lose it. The sooner hearing loss is treated, the better outcomes people have with treatments such as hearing aids. So, make an appointment and have your hearing tested to determine the best treatment option for your hearing loss.

## **Protect Your Hearing**

When you recognize that you may have hearing loss, protecting the hearing you have left becomes even more important.

Ensure you are protecting your hearing when you are exposed to loud noise. Loud noise can be anything from a hair dryer to a jackhammer. Protecting your ears can be as simple as covering your ears when suddenly exposed to loud noise. Or you can be prepared by having hearing protection on-hand. For example, always keep hearing protection handy near your lawn mower so you can remember to wear the protection before starting the mower.

Hearing protection is not a complicated matter. Simple foam earplugs are available at most stores and are inexpensive. If you are regularly exposed to certain types of loud noise, custom hearing protection may be more ideal. These often provide improved protection with increased comfort. These kinds of custom protection can be obtained from an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist.

## **Providing Caring Support**

Hearing loss can occur gradually and is often first noticed by family, friends and loved ones. It is often recommended you bring a loved one with you to your hearing evaluation appointment. Not only can they offer you support, but can contribute valuable information when discussing your symptoms and communication difficulties you have experienced due to hearing loss.

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# SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS

- Do you have trouble hearing in open spaces like houses of worship, auditoriums or theaters?
- Do you turn up the volume louder than anyone else in the room?
- Do you have a hard time hearing people on the telephone?
- Do you miss parts of a movie when the actor turns away from the camera?
- Do you have difficulty hearing in loud places like restaurants or loud parties?
- Do you ever experience “ringing” in the ears?
- Do you have difficulty hearing the voices of children?
- Do find yourself asking “What?” a lot?
- Have friends and family told you to have your hearing checked?
- Do you hear sounds that “aren’t there,” like clicks, pops and whooshes?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have hearing loss you haven’t recognized or acknowledged yet.

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# HEARING AIDS

PART 2

The vast majority of hearing aids sold today are digital, and thanks to advancements in digital technology, hearing aid wearers are experiencing improved sound quality and better hearing.

**T**oday's hearing aids are smaller, more comfortable and more effective than ever before, which may explain why hearing aid wearer satisfaction with new hearing aids has continued to increase through the years.

Recent data, published in 2010 by the Better Hearing Institute, indicates that hearing aid satisfaction has increased to 86 percent for hearing aid wearers. In addition, consumers report improved sound processing in areas such as whistling and feedback, sound of chewing and swallowing, wind noise, use in noisy situations, use while using cell phones and comfort with loud sounds.

There are many different styles of hearing aids to choose from with a host of advanced features available that allow ease of use and advanced listening in difficult situations.



## HEARING LOSS CAN HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON OUR LOVED ONES AND THOSE AROUND US

When it comes to finding the right hearing aid for your lifestyle you have a ton of great options to choose from with in-the-ear and behind-the-ear styles.

## Welcome to the dawn of a new age in hearing solutions

When you think “hearing aids,” do you think of those big, clunky devices and a tangle of wires? The kind of hearing aid that grampa used to fuss about? Or the old hearing aid collecting dust in a drawer somewhere in your house?

Thanks to digital technology and a focus on improved design among hearing aid manufacturers, today’s hearing aids are smaller, lighter, more discrete and more automated, delivering a more natural hearing experience.

So, which kind of hearing aid is right for you? There are lots of options depending on your preferences and lifestyle. From completely invisible to wild colors that make a fashion statement, the choice is yours.

## So, how do you choose which kind of hearing aid best suits your needs, preferences and hearing loss?

The first step is to have your hearing evaluated to determine the type and degree of your hearing loss. The hearing professional will then discuss with you the styles of hearing aids that are most appropriate for your hearing loss.

Your lifestyle and listening demands should then be discussed to determine which features should be included in order to choose the hearing aid that best meets your needs.



### LOUD AND CLEAR

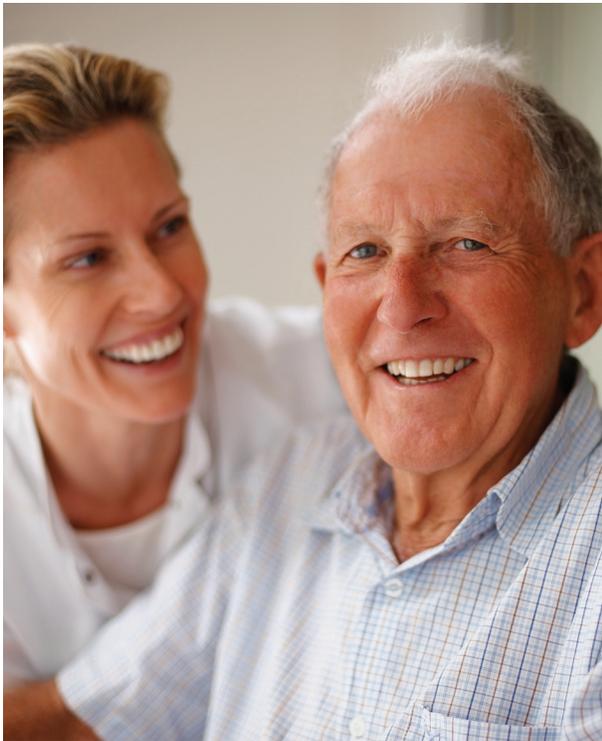
Today’s hearing aids are packed full of the latest hearing technology





Only **25 percent** of those who would benefit from hearing aids wear them.

That means that the remaining **75 percent** choose not to treat their hearing loss.



In-the-ear hearing aid styles are custom made to each person's individual ear based on an impression taken of the outer ear and ear canal. They are available in a variety of colors to match different skin tones, improving cosmetic appeal.



### **Invisible in the Canal (IIC)**

The smallest custom style, IIC instruments, sit invisibly in or past the second bend of the ear canal. IIC devices are specifically designed for mild-to-moderate hearing loss.



### **Completely in the Canal (CIC)**

These are the smallest custom hearing aids. CICs slip deep into the ear canal, making them all but invisible to the world. They're ideal for people with mild-to-moderate hearing loss who are seeking a cosmetically discreet option.



### **In the Canal (ITC)**

ITC hearing aids sit in the lower portion of the outer ear bowl, making them comfortable and cosmetically appealing. Because they are larger than a CIC, they can have additional features such as a push button for multiple listening programs and directional microphones for use in noisy environments. They are ideal for mild-to-moderate hearing loss as well.



### **In the Ear (ITE)**

ITE hearing aids fill more of the outer bowl of the ear than ITC hearing aids. This model allows for the maximum number of features to be available because of its larger size. ITEs use a larger battery size and provide enough power even for people with severe hearing loss. They are a good option for people who may have limits of dexterity in their fingers.

Behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids sit behind or on top of the outer ear, with tubing that routes the sound into the ear canal. BTEs come in a variety of colors to blend with different hair colors and skin ones.



### **Mini BTE with Slim Tube**

Mini BTEs are designed to hide behind the outer ear and discretely route sound into the ear canal through an ultra-thin tube. The tubing connects to a soft tip which sits in the ear canal but does not block the ear canal. This allows for an “open fitting” which results in a natural, open feeling and still allows sound and air to enter the ear naturally. These “open fit” hearing aids are ideal for people with mild-to-moderate hearing loss seeking a cosmetically appealing device.



### **Receiver in the Canal (RIC)**

RIC hearing aids, also referred to as receiver in the ear (RITE), are mini BTEs that incorporate the small speaker of the hearing aid into the ear tip so that the sound is delivered as close to the eardrum as possible. Although RIC hearing aids look very similar to mini BTEs with slim tubes, they are slightly more powerful and fit mild-to-severe hearing losses.



### **BTE with Earmold**

BTE hearing aids with earmolds are designed to fit a wide range of hearing losses from mild to severe. The sound is routed through tubing to a custom-made earmold which can vary in size and color. BTEs with earmolds are slightly longer in shape and sit behind the outer ear. They are available in a wide range of colors to match hair or skin tone. Because of their shape and design, BTEs can host more features, controls and power than ITE styles.



# TURN THE VOLUME DOWN

Noise-induced hearing loss is on the rise, and hearing professionals are seeing noise-induced hearing loss in younger patients each day. Both the level and length of time you are exposed to noise, including loud music, determines if the noise will cause damage. Hearing loss from noise is permanent as it damages the hair hair-like projections of the inner ear.

By wearing hearing protection and purchasing noise-canceling headphones to use while listening to music, you can take healthy steps towards protecting your hearing. A comprehensive hearing evaluation is the only way to determine if you have damage due to noise exposure.

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There are many factors that should be considered and discussed with your hearing professional when selecting the right hearing aids for you.

## **Hearing Comfort**

Sound quality is certainly an important consideration. You want sounds that are natural and unprocessed. However, you may not recognize the quality of sound when you first wear your hearing aids. All hearing aids process the sound you hear. Your hearing aids are specifically tuned to address the specifics of your hearing loss.

However, expect a transition period. Your brain will require time to not only get used to hearing sounds that it has missed due to your hearing loss, but it will also require time to adapt to the sound quality your hearing aids deliver. Hearing professionals want you to have a good, positive hearing experience and will work with you during the trial period to make all necessary adjustments to ensure you have a positive transition period and experience hearing comfort.

Over time, your perception of sound will change as you and your brain adjust to the new sound. It is not uncommon for new hearing aid wearers to return for multiple follow up appointments during the first six months as you and your brain adapt. By working closely with your hearing professional, you will ensure your hearing aids are adjusted properly for your unique needs.

## **Lifestyle**

If you lead an active life – a life filled with physical activity and listening in diverse environments (dinner parties, board room meetings, health club) you want to choose a hearing aid that will keep up with you and work for you.

If you're a runner and sweat a lot, there's no need to give up your favorite hobby. Simply tell your hearing professional about how you spend your free time and she'll point you to a model that will keep you in the game longer and accommodate your lifestyle needs (such as moisture resistance for your sweaty runs).

It's true. You can do just about anything you do now with the right set of hearing aids. The decision is up to you. For instance, some people prefer driving standard cars versus automatics that do the shifting for you. Same with hearing aids. You can purchase hearing aids that take care of the details, or you can purchase hearing aids where you have more physical control.

**It's a matter of personal preference...  
one you should consider carefully before  
making your purchase.**

If you'd rather the hearing aid take care of itself, go for the more advanced technology. If you want to make adjustments manually, that's easy, too. A simple volume wheel or remote control increases your control over volume and program settings. Talk to your hearing professional about how much automation you would like and discuss what you are willing to pay for the most advanced features available.

## **Automation and Convenience**

Today's hearing aids will automatically adjust various advanced features to listening conditions so you can focus on what you want to hear and listen with ease. This technology can be found even on entry-level hearing aids.

### Price

*How much?* Almost always this is the first question hearing aid consumers ask. And there is nothing wrong with that. This is a major investment you will be making, but it is an investment in your quality of life and one that will last for a while.

You may be surprised to learn that hearing aid prices have actually decreased over time when compared to the average rate of inflation. Today's digital hearing aids range from approximately \$1000-5000 per hearing aid, depending upon the level of technology.

There are many different factors that contribute to hearing aid prices in addition to the level of technology. These factors include research and development costs, manufacturing costs, geographical location and the time spent with the hearing professional who fits and services the hearing aids for you.

It's a mistake to base your decision solely on cost. Buying a pair of cheap hearing aids may save you some money, but if they end up in a drawer and you don't enjoy the benefits, what good is saving a few bucks?

When you consider that hearing aids are proven to not only help you hear better, but to actually improve the quality of life for you and your family members, that is money well invested.

### Features that provide convenience and automation in today's hearing aids are:

**Directional Microphone Systems** – provides preference to sounds coming from the front of the wearer and reduces sound coming from other directions. This technology is proven to improve speech understanding in background noise.

**Digital Noise Reduction (DNR)** – Automatically determines if the signal contains unwanted noise and reduces level of noise if present in the listening environment. The background noise is less distracting and listening comfort is increased.

**Impulse Noise Reduction** – This technology automatically dampens quick impulse noises such as doors slamming and dishes clanking and is designed to improve listening comfort.

**Wind Noise Reduction** – Automatically reduces the whooshing noise of wind blowing across the hearing aid microphones. Designed to improve listening comfort for people who spend time outdoors such as golfers, walkers and bikers.

**Feedback Management** – Automatically reduces or eliminates whistling that can sometimes occur with hearing aid use. This technology is designed to improve comfort from annoying whistling.

**Telecoil / Auto Telecoil** - Picks up a signal from a compatible telephone and allows wearers to listen to the telephone without feedback (whistling).

**Bluetooth/Wireless Connectivity** – Allows users to wirelessly connect to cell phones, MP3 players or other Bluetooth devices without much of the distortion or interference that can be caused with a telecoil. It usually requires a small device worn around the neck.

**Data Logging** - Automatically stores data in the hearing aids about the listening environments and adjustments made by the user while the hearing aids are worn. The data can later be viewed by the hearing professional and is used for more precise programming changes to the hearing aid.

**Learning / Training** - Hearing aids can learn the user's preferences based on consistent changes made by the wearer, such as the preferred volume. The hearing aid can then automatically make these changes to the overall programming of the hearing aid without having to see the hearing care professional. This allows for user personalization and comfort.

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Research supports that most hearing aid wearers are more successful when two hearing aids are worn versus just one.

## **Two hearing aids deliver a more natural and enjoyable listening experience.**

Yes, quality hearing aids are an investment. You might be tempted to purchase just one hearing aid for your “bad ear.” Or perhaps you think starting with just one will make the transition of wearing hearing aids easier.

Purchasing one may sound tempting when you first start shopping for hearing aids. It cuts the cost in half, right? If two hearing aids have been recommended to you for your hearing loss, why settle for just one? There is ample research to support that most hearing aid wearers are more successful when two hearing aids are worn versus just one.

Hearing professionals recommend that consumers purchase two hearing aids – one for each ear, of course. The hearing loss you experience in one ear is often different from the hearing loss experienced in the other. Thus, the hearing professional can adjust each hearing aid individually to address the hearing loss in each ear. In addition, our brains are wired to receive input from two ears to enhance our listening skills. If only one ear is receiving amplification, many of our enhanced listening skills are lost.

Overall in most cases, you’re better off going with two hearing aids to deliver a higher quality of sound and a more natural and enjoyable listening experience.

## **Some of the benefits of wearing two hearing aids include:**

- Better ability to tell where sounds are coming from
- Better hearing in background noise
- Better sound quality due to “stereo” hearing
- Better hearing for soft sounds
- Less strain since both ears are working together
- Balanced hearing
- Higher success and satisfaction

Knowing what to expect and having proper expectations from hearing aids can ensure your maximum satisfaction with them.

## Some expectations to keep in mind during the hearing aid process:

- Hearing aids will sound different at first and your brain needs time to adjust listening to the new sound from them. The adjustment period is different for everyone.
- At first the sound from hearing aids may sound unnatural. Give it time. Eventually your auditor nerves and brain will adjust to hearing sound again, and over time your hearing aids will sound more natural.
- With hearing aids you should be able to hear many sounds you can't hear without them. You should notice improved hearing in many listening situations that are important to you.
- Hearing aids should be comfortable to wear and not cause pain or discomfort. Some physical adjustments may be necessary to ensure a perfect fit.
- Learning to hear sounds again is a gradual process. Give yourself time and be patient.
- Hearing aids won't allow you to hear every sound in every situation. Remember, even people with normal hearing miss sounds from time to time.
- Hearing aids will help you hear better, but they do not restore normal hearing.
- Part of the hearing aid fitting process is programming your hearing aids to your particular hearing needs. This will occur over several appointments with your hearing professional after you have been able to wear your hearing aids in a variety of listening situations. Your hearing professional is your partner in this journey, so utilize their expertise and skills.



### ASK A PROFESSIONAL

Your audiologist can help you with any questions you have regarding hearing loss



Congratulations on taking control over your hearing health and taking a positive step toward a better quality of life for you or a loved one.

## **Now is the time in your life to take the first steps toward better hearing**

You have taken the time to read through this important information which means you are motivated to make a change in your life towards better hearing and better living.

The first step in getting hearing aids is to have a complete hearing evaluation to determine the extent of your hearing loss by a professional who specializes in hearing aids and amplification.

A comprehensive hearing evaluation is a painless, safe and inexpensive test that measures the level of hearing in each ear and determines if you are, in fact, a hearing aid candidate.

Hearing loss can be frustrating and affect more than just your ability to hear. It can negatively affect your overall quality of life, relationships with friends and love ones, and your work performance.

**Make that call today to begin your journey towards better hearing and better living.**



### **THE SOUNDS OF LIFE**

Hear the sounds of life in a whole new way

