

- Are services such as regular checkups, cleanings, follow-up visits, and orientation sessions included in the cost of the hearing aids or will I pay for them separately?
- Is there a trial period during which I can evaluate hearing aids? If so, is this free or is there a charge?
- How does the hearing aid work with the telephone and other assistive devices?
- Does the hearing aid contain a telecoil and if so, is it activated?
- Will the hearing care professional check my insurance status and coverage provisions as well as provide information about resources that might assist with payment if needed?
- Will written information on care and maintenance, installation of batteries, warranties/loss and damage coverage, and other information discussed be given to me?
- Did I receive a copy of a written statement which describes the products and services to be provided and their cost?

Please note: It is important to read every word of the contract before signing. Do not sign anything you do not understand.

- What happens if I have a problem with the hearing aids?

For additional information on hearing loss/hearing aids, contact:

1) NC Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
2301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2301
Physical Address: Woodoak Building GL-3
1100 Navaho Drive, Raleigh, NC 27609
Phone: 1-800-851-6099 (Voice/TTY) Fax: (919) 855-6872
Website: www.ncdhs.gov/dsdhh

2) Your local hearing care professional

Who should I consult if I feel that I have been treated unfairly in the process of obtaining hearing aids?

There are three agencies that can assist you with your written complaint:

- 1) North Carolina Hearing Aid Dealers and Fitters Board:
PO Box 97833, Raleigh, NC 27624-7833
Phone: (919) 834-3661 Fax: (919) 834-3665
Email: info@nchalb.org
- 2) North Carolina Board of Examiners for Speech and Language Pathologists and Audiologists
PO Box 16885, Greensboro, NC 27416-0885
Phone: (336) 272-1828 Fax: (336) 272-4353
Email: scapps@ncboeslpa.org

- 3) Department of Justice- Attorney General's Office,
Consumer Protection Division
9001 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-9001
Phone: (919) 716-6000 Fax: (919) 716-6050
Website: www.ncdoj.gov

This publication is the result of a mandate by the NC General Assembly to ensure that consumers have information about the treatment of hearing loss and the purchase of hearing aids.



The following contributed to its development:

- NC State Hearing Aid Dealers and Fitters Board
- NC Department of Health and Human Services,
Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
- NC Attorney General's Office, Consumer Protection Division
- NC Board of Examiners for Speech and Language Pathologists and Audiologists
- AARP North Carolina
- Hearing Loss Association of North Carolina
- North Carolina Association of Hearing Care Professionals
- American Academy of Audiology- North Carolina

North Carolina Consumers' Guide on Hearing Loss and Hearing Aids

You're not alone...

Over one million North Carolina residents have hearing loss and can benefit from the use of hearing aids. Less than half of these individuals have sought help. If you have any of the following symptoms, have your hearing tested by a North Carolina licensed hearing care professional:

- You hear, but have trouble understanding all the words in a conversation.
- People seem to mumble, speak indistinctly, or speak too softly.
- You often ask people to repeat themselves.
- You have difficulty understanding conversation in groups/crowds.
- You find telephone conversation increasingly difficult.
- Your family complains that you play the TV too loudly.
- You experience ringing or other noises in your ears.

Untreated hearing loss can have significant consequences:

- Avoidance or withdrawal from social situations
- Irritability, anger, fatigue, stress, and depression
- Increased risk to personal safety
- Diminished speech understanding
- Reduced job performance and earning power
- Impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks

"Use it or lose it".

Every year that your hearing loss goes untreated, research suggests you will lose more and more of your ability to understand speech. This is critical when you are trying to understand the difference between words which are very similar, such as "three" and "free". This is why individuals often "hear, but don't understand". The sooner you begin wearing hearing aids, the more successful you will be at understanding conversations throughout your lifetime.

How do I get started?

First, have your hearing checked. In North Carolina, this may be done by an audiologist, hearing instrument specialist, or physician. If your hearing test reveals that your hearing loss requires medical attention (approximately 5% of cases), your hearing care professional will advise you to seek medical attention. However, 95% of the time, hearing loss does not require medical attention. In this case, your hearing care professional can provide expertise and recommendations regarding hearing aids.

Finding a Professional

To find a hearing care professional in your area, you may look in your local phone book in the yellow pages under audiologists or hearing aids. You may also ask your physician, friends, or family members to refer you to someone. Once you have chosen a professional, you should verify that the professional is licensed in North Carolina by contacting one of the following North Carolina licensure boards:

North Carolina Hearing Aid Dealers and Fitters Board
www.nchalb.org Phone: (919) 834-3661

or the

**North Carolina Board of Examiners for
Speech and Language Pathologists and Audiologists**
www.ncboeslpa.org Phone: (336) 272-1828.

Remember, the professional you choose will work with you for many years to come. It is very important that you feel comfortable and trust them.

Selecting hearing aids

There is no single hearing aid suitable for all types of hearing loss; therefore, your hearing care professional will recommend the most appropriate options for you. The hearing aids recommended depend on the nature and extent of your hearing loss. It is also important that the hearing aid technology you choose match your lifestyle and listening needs. The primary objective is to select hearing instruments that will best meet your communication needs. See the Consumer's Checklist on the next page for important questions you should ask when purchasing hearing aids. In addition, it is very helpful to bring someone with you to assist you during this important decision making process. Purchasing hearing aids through the mail or internet is strongly discouraged. Hearing aids should be purchased from a North Carolina licensed hearing care professional, who will provide the proper evaluation, selection, fitting, and follow-up services. These services are considered essential for your overall success.

Expectations and Outcomes

While hearing aids make sounds easier to hear, they will not restore normal hearing. Hearing aids re-introduce you to many of the sounds you have been missing. It takes time to relearn these sounds. Some people adjust quickly; others take longer. Your outcome with hearing aids will vary by the type and degree of your hearing loss, accuracy of evaluation, and proper fit. Your ability to adapt to hearing aids is the most important factor for your success.

Consumer's Checklist to Purchasing Hearing Aids

- What are the qualifications (educational background, training, experience) of the professional I will be seeing?
- Were you given a hearing screening or a hearing evaluation? Hearing screenings (pass/fail) are a quick and easy way to find out if you need in depth testing for hearing loss, and are widely available at little or no cost. Hearing evaluations determine the degree, type, and configuration of hearing loss, and assist with determining whether you are a good candidate for hearing aids.
- Have the results of my hearing test been thoroughly explained to me?
- Does my hearing test show that I need one or two hearing aids?
- Has my hearing care professional discussed my goals for hearing better?
- How will hearing aids help me hear better?
- Are there certain models of hearing aids that will be easier to use?
- What are the most appropriate hearing aids for me? What is the cost?
- What are other recommendations for hearing aids?
- What are the special features of hearing aids and their additional costs? (telecoil, directional microphones, volume control, noise management, feedback control, wireless capabilities)
- What are my preferences regarding style, cost, size, and durability?

