



What you need to know about hearing aids.

The following information is presented for educational purposes only and should never replace the advice of a hearing care professional.

Hearing Loss – A Fact of Life For Baby Boomers

Now the largest segment of American society, Baby Boomers, have endured, and are responsible for, a greater increase in noise pollution than any other generation. Prolonged or loud noise exposure seems to have overtaken age as the leading cause of hearing loss.

Add to that the fact that Baby Boomers will live longer than any previous generation, and you have the largest number of people ever to face this problem. In fact, about 40 percent of hearing-impaired Americans are under age 65.

Hearing is essential to fully enjoying and participating in life, but one in ten Americans — more than 31 million — experience some degree of hearing loss. This makes it our third most prevalent chronic health condition, after arthritis and high blood pressure.

How do you know whether you or someone you love might benefit from hearing aids?

- Family or friends often have to repeat what they say
- Frustration from not clearly understanding others
- Trouble understanding speech on television at normal volume levels
- Trouble understanding speech when background noise is present
- Embarrassment from being unable to hear when meeting new people

If you suspect that you or someone you love is experiencing hearing difficulty, HearingPlanet's Buyer's Guide is the right place to start. Its purpose is to answer your questions and provide the information necessary to make an informed decision about improving your hearing and, in turn, your quality of life.

Frequently Asked Questions About Hearing Aids

What is a digital hearing aid?

Digital hearing instruments represent the most advanced technology available today and allow the most precise prescriptive fitting. More than 90 percent of all hearing aids sold are digital. These instruments contain a tiny custom-programmed chip and offer the best way to match a particular patient's hearing loss with the precise amplification needed.

Their unique technology separates the incoming sound into discreet bands or channels, each of which can be processed independently. Complete flexibility and amazing fine-tuning capability are among the many benefits.

I've heard quite a bit about "open-fit" hearing aids. What are they?

This newer category has been widely available for more than three years and all major hearing aid manufacturers offer one or more models. Open-fit hearing aids are specifically designed to address high-frequency hearing loss without creating a "stopped up" feeling in the ear.

A miniature device is placed on top of the ear against the head so it is essentially hidden from view. A very narrow, clear tube is then placed inside the ear canal, which delivers the sound to the ear. The ear canal is left open and sophisticated digital circuitry keeps feedback at a minimum or even non-existent.

What is the best hearing aid on the market?

This is one of the most frequent questions we're asked. There are several very good major brands, but there is no single "best hearing aid."

The best hearing aid is the one that suits an individual's unique lifestyle and hearing loss. A personal Hearing Consultant and our local Hearing Professional will be happy to educate you about various options, and help select the right model.

What features should I look for in a hearing aid?

HearingPlanet Consumer Feedback Surveys tell us there is a combination of features that provide greater satisfaction. Our customers, typically, are most satisfied with a hearing aid that includes the following features:

- **Directional Microphones.** These improve speech understanding in noisy environments by using two microphones to better separate unwanted sounds behind the wearer from the important speech sounds in front of the wearer.
- **Multiple Compression Channels.** These react quickly enough to increase the volume for crucial speech sounds, lower it for louder ambient noises, and protect the wearer from sudden loud sounds like slamming doors.
- **Multiple programs.** Also called "memories," these let the wearer change the manner in which the hearing aid processes sound when moving from one environment to another, providing more control over various listening situations.
- **Noise Reduction.** This makes listening to speech more comfortable in difficult or noisy situations. Noise reduction is available in different levels of technology and can vary in its effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to understand that having noise reduction in hearing aids does not mean background noise is eliminated.

What are the differences among various hearing aid manufacturers?

There is truly very little difference in quality or performance when comparing today's major brands. While there are more than 20 different hearing aid manufacturers, only about seven companies research and design the digital circuits on the market.

We recommend those brands of hearing aids based on proven quality, digital processing, and reliability. In every case, our Hearing Consultants and your local Hearing Professional help in selecting the best hearing aid for your unique hearing loss and personal needs.

I've worn hearing aids before. Will the newer digital hearing aid features help me?

In the past two years we have seen tremendous advances in hearing aid features. This has led to consumer satisfaction rates reaching an all-time high (see chart below). Most consumers want technology to help them hear better when background noise is present and to minimize feedback.

Some newer hearing aid features include, but are not limited to, data-logging, automatic program changes, use of remote control, and digital feedback suppression. Previous hearing aid wearers should contact one of our Hearing Consultants at 800-432-7669 to learn more about these features and if they may be appropriate for their needs.

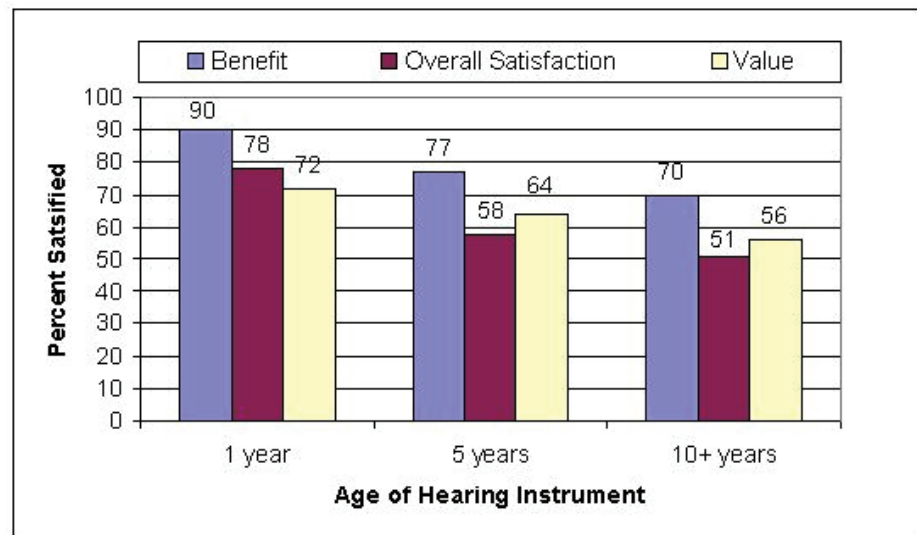


Chart source: Kochkin, S. Customer Satisfaction with Hearing Aids in the Digital Age, *The Hearing Journal*, Vol. 58(9) September 2002, pp. 30-37

Will my hearing become worse if I wait to buy hearing aids?

For years we have known that aging and noise exposure take their toll on our ability to hear. This is true whether or not we use hearing aids.

However, research shows that the ability to make sense of what we hear deteriorates more rapidly if the hearing pathway is not stimulated. Therefore, a decision to delay being fit with hearing aids will not cause hearing to become worse, but it may make it more difficult to adapt and benefit from hearing aids later on.

This is a very good reason for not waiting until hearing aids are absolutely needed. Unfortunately, we see too many people make the mistake of waiting to buy hearing aids because they feel their hearing “isn’t bad enough.” The experts at HearingPlanet can help in making this decision.

Can I use Bluetooth with hearing aids?

Yes. Bluetooth devices can be used with certain models of hearing aids, but additional parts are needed. This is a new area of technology in hearing aids, so please contact one of our Hearing Consultants for more information and costs.

How much do hearing aids cost?

Hearing aids have a very wide price range and almost 90 percent of people are fit with two devices. Pricing depends on the style and technology level recommended for an individual’s hearing loss and lifestyle needs. This is determined after a hearing test is completed. When purchasing hearing aids through HearingPlanet, you can be assured of paying the fairest prices for the best hearing aids. Our pricing includes all fitting, as well as a minimum of one year of follow-up services through our endorsed local Hearing Professionals.

Frequently Asked Questions About HearingPlanet

Can I really save money on my hearing aid purchase through HearingPlanet?

Yes. HearingPlanet’s pricing is typically lower than a traditional retail clinic’s. Everyone who contacts us receives personalized attention and guidance from one of our highly skilled Hearing Consultants. Each consultant stays with you throughout the entire process, providing a level of service no other company offers.

In addition, our Endorsed Local Hearing Professionals provide everything from testing to fitting to follow-up services at a convenient location. When this is combined with the wide selection of manufacturers we offer, HearingPlanet provides a comprehensive package for anyone researching and buying hearing aids.

What can you tell me about HearingPlanet's Endorsed Local Clinics?

Our nationwide network of Endorsed Local Clinics is a unique concept. Every one of the 1,100 professional locations must meet our strict standards for expertise, quality, and care before we agree to partner with them.

Because of our high standards, we go out of our way to find experts who are highly qualified in evaluating hearing loss, fitting and programming hearing aids, and all other aspects of this highly technical field.

You can take comfort in knowing that we not only pre-screen the local professionals in our nationwide network, but we also continually check performance through monthly client satisfaction audits. We consider it as doing our homework, so you don't have to.

Another added benefit of our nationwide network is the ability to arrange service for patients who move or are traveling within the United States. A Hearing Consultant quickly puts the patient in touch with a provider convenient to wherever the patient happens to be.

How do I arrange an appointment at an Endorsed Local Clinic near me?

Arranging an appointment at one of HearingPlanet's Endorsed Local Clinics is easy and takes only a few minutes. After the Hearing Consultant asks a few simple questions to learn more about your hearing needs, the Consultant will assist in arranging an appointment at the location closest to home or work. The process can begin just by calling 1-800-432-7669.

Can you work with me if I'm calling on behalf of a family member needing hearing aids?

Every day HearingPlanet helps sons and daughters calling for parents or grandparents, or nieces and nephews calling for aunts and uncles. Our Hearing Consultants are trained to work with family members in making all the necessary arrangements for a successful hearing aid experience. Some of our most successful patient stories are the result of family members helping each other toward better hearing and better living.

Can I talk with an on-staff audiologist if I have questions or a problem?

Yes. HearingPlanet has Audiologists available by phone 5 days a week: Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., central time, at 1-800-432-7669. If you call outside those times, leave a message. We will return your call the next business day.

Do I have choice of hearing aid brands with HearingPlanet?

Absolutely. Unlike franchise retailers, HearingPlanet offers more than a dozen brands of hearing aids. The advantage to this is that we are better able to suit a patient's hearing loss and lifestyle needs.

Some of the brands we carry include Phonak, Resound, Siemens, Oticon, Widex, Starkey, Sonic Innovations, as well as many others.

What is included in the cost of hearing aids when I purchase through HearingPlanet?

The hearing aids, batteries for the trial period, standard manufacturer's repair warranty, a loss or damage warranty, 45-day trial period, all fitting fees, and one year's service from an Endorsed Local Clinic are included in the purchase price. There are no hidden costs.

What should I expect from the local hearing test when scheduled through HearingPlanet?

Many of our patient testimonials specifically address the thoroughness of the hearing exam at an Endorsed Local Clinic. This thoroughness and the consultation afterward are crucial to determining the best hearing aid. In many instances, a HearingPlanet hearing test will be completed at no charge.

In other situations our local Audiologists, who are classified as medical providers, can bill private health insurance, if needed. This can be discussed in detail when arranging an appointment for a hearing test.

What payment options do I have?

One of our goals is to make hearing care more affordable and paying for it easier. We accept payment by check and credit card and offer payment plans. On certain models, options include 12 months interest-free with a low minimum payment. Financing is also available for up to 4 years at a low, fixed rate. Whether someone qualifies can be determined over the phone in just a few minutes.

What happens if I am not happy with my hearing aids?

Since HearingPlanet provides a 45-day trial period, there are plenty of opportunities to work with a local professional to see if a particular hearing aid is right. If it doesn't meet your needs, we can exchange it for a different model. Or it can be returned for a refund, less a small service fee to cover basic expenses of the local professional's time, plus the cost to process a custom order.

Hearing Aid Styles and Technology

Hearing aid "technology" refers to the circuitry inside a hearing aid.

"Style" refers to the size and shape. A hearing aid might be a behind-the-ear style, or the tiny completely-in-the-canal style.

There are currently four styles:



BTE or Behind-the-Ear hearing aid



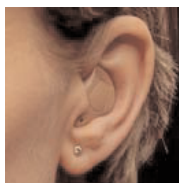
Open Fit hearing aid

Behind-The-Ear (BTE)

Behind-The-Ear is the style most familiar to those of us over 30. The hearing aid is housed in a durable case that rests on the back of the outer ear. In the late 1980s, it seemed it would soon fade into obsolescence. Instead, BTE models have actually made a comeback, since they offer

wearers and audiologists more flexibility.

This style can address more types of hearing loss than any other. It is much smaller and comes in a variety of colors that blend with skin and hair color. Over half our patients choose BTEs for this reason. It is also the only style that will work for severe and profound hearing losses. Open-fit hearing aids, discussed previously in this guide, fall under this style as well.



ITE or In-the-Ear hearing aid

In-The-Ear (ITE)

The full-size In-The-Ear style became available in the early 1980s. An ITE hearing aid can fit for the majority of hearing losses. This size is the easiest to handle for patients whose hands are no longer as nimble as they used to be. Its larger size also accommodates a larger battery, which translates to longer battery life. Another benefit is that its size allows for more features, such as directional

microphones and memory programs. This hearing aid is housed in a custom-made acrylic shell.

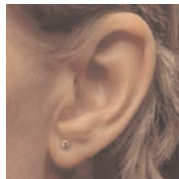


ITC or In-the-Canal hearing aid

In-The-Canal (ITC)

You can think of an In-The-Canal hearing aid as a smaller version of the In-The-Ear instrument. Today, it's the most popular custom hearing aid style. Like the ITE, it is made of a custom acrylic shell that holds all the electronics.

ITC is a good choice for those with mild or moderate hearing losses. It is smaller and less noticeable than a standard In-The-Ear. Users normally get better sound localization because the microphone placement takes advantage of the external ear's sound reflecting properties. Some people also find it easier to handle than the In-The-Ear style. Many of today's manufacturers are now able to place directional microphones and memory buttons in ITC hearing aids.



CIC or Completely-in-the-ear hearing aid

Completely-In-The-Canal (CIC)

The Completely-In-The-Canal hearing aid is designed to fit just as its name implies – completely inside the ear canal. The cosmetic appeal of this style depends largely on the size and shape of the wearer's ear canal. Manufacturing limitations, the shape of the ear canal, and patient comfort all factor into the size of the device.

This style requires patience. Frequent follow-up visits can be necessary to improve comfort and retention because of how deeply CIC aids fit in the ear canal. Their popularity has dropped drastically during the past couple of years due to the success of open-fit Behind-The-Ear hearing aid models and their cosmetic appeal.

However, there are some advantages beyond cosmetic appeal with CIC hearing aids: improved telephone use, less wind noise when outdoors, and better sound localization.

One Hearing Aid or Two?

The benefit of wearing one hearing aid, as opposed to wearing two, can usually be determined by asking two questions:

Can hearing in both ears be improved by amplification? And does the wearer want to understand others as well as possible in a variety of environments?

If the answer to both questions is yes, there can be a tremendous benefit to wearing two hearing aids instead of one. This is known as a “binaural fitting.”

Binaural fittings offer the following advantages:

- Greater speech understanding in noisy environments
- Reduced need for volume
- Improved ability to locate a sound source
- Consistent stimulation of the entire auditory system, leading to improved understanding of speech.

Research shows that binaural hearing aid fittings give greater speech understanding in difficult listening conditions. Our brains are designed to receive sensory information from two ears. Sounds need to arrive at different times and intensities before we can make sense of the multitude of sounds and voices in a crowded room. This can only be achieved with balanced hearing.

Binaural hearing also helps determine where a voice originates. As it interprets the world, the brain adds together the perception of loudness from both ears. So with a single hearing aid, if the sound coming into the ears is unbalanced, the wearer may not be able to determine immediately the location of the speaker.

But with hearing aids in both ears, this loudness summing capability means the volume in each hearing aid does not have to be turned up as high. Less amplification means less unwanted, amplified background noise. Research and patient experience tell us overwhelmingly that wearing two hearing aids is better than wearing one. Of course, there are occasional exceptions, but these can be determined during the hearing test.

Taking the Next Step – A Hearing Test

The first step to take when considering hearing aids is scheduling a professional hearing test. Call us at 1-800-432-7669 and a Personal Hearing Consultant will assist in scheduling an appointment with an Endorsed Local Clinic.

Here's what to expect during the hearing evaluation and consultation:

1. The Hearing Consultant and local Professional will discuss lifestyle to determine needs and expectations. The rhythms of a wearer's life, the environment, and the style of interaction all figure into any hearing aid recommendation.
2. There will be a thorough exam of the ears. This may reveal excessive earwax, eardrum damage, or other hearing-related conditions. Some hearing problems, like earwax buildup, usually can be resolved quickly and easily. At HearingPlanet, our Hearing Professionals always look for the simplest solution first.
3. There will be a comprehensive hearing evaluation, including pure tone testing, speech understanding, and other specialized tests if needed.
4. Our local Hearing Professional will then discuss the test results, explaining the degree and nature of hearing loss. If hearing loss is diagnosed, hearing aid options will be discussed and all questions will be answered.

Why HearingPlanet?

HearingPlanet's commitment to our clients, coupled with the highest quality, personalized customer service and nationwide Endorsed Local Clinic network, make us a wise choice when shopping for hearing care needs.

We hope this guide has answered most of your questions about choosing hearing aids. If you'd like more information, want to share your experiences or opinions, or are ready to schedule a comprehensive hearing evaluation at one of our local Hearing Professionals, simply call us toll-free at **1-800-432-7669**. Ask to speak with a Hearing Consultant and you will receive immediate, courteous assistance. Email us at customerservice@hearingplanet.com

Hearing Aid Comparison Chart

HearingPlanet has compiled this comparison chart to help you understand the differences between various brands and models of digital hearing aids. In many cases, you can click on the model name of the hearing aid for more detailed information, including prices and downloadable product brochures.

If you'd like information on a specific model that isn't listed here, please call us toll-free at 1-800-432-7669. We look forward to helping you become a more informed consumer.

Manufacturer	Model	# Channels	Noise Reduction	# Listening Programs	Manufacturer Warranty
Phonak	Savia	20 channels	YES	3 CIC, 4 Others	Two Year
Phonak	Eleva	16 channels	YES	3	Two Year
Phonak	Mini Valeo	15 channels - OPEN	YES	3 + Mute	Two Year
Phonak	Valeo	15 channels	YES	3 + Mute	Two Year
Phonak	Amio	5 channels	Optional	3	One Year
Phonak	eXtra	6 channels	YES	2	One Year
Phonak	MAXX BTE	6 channels	Noise canceler	1	One Year
Siemens	Centra	16 channels	YES	3	Two Year
Siemens	Acuris	16 channels	YES	3	Two Year
Siemens	Acuris Life	16 channels	YES	2 w/remote	Two Year
Siemens	Artis (e2e)	12 channels	YES	3	Two Year
Siemens	Artis Life (Open fit)	12 channels	YES	2 w/remote	Two Year
Siemens	Cielo	6 channels	YES	3	Two Year
GN Resound	Metrix	17 bands	YES - Advanced	4	Three Year
GN Resound	Pixel	17 bands	YES	4	Two Year
GN Resound	Plus 5	6 bands	YES	2	Two Year
GN Resound	Pulse	3 channels	YES - Advanced	1	Two Year
GN Resound	AiR Plus	3 channels - OPEN	YES	None	Two Year
GN Resound	Canta 2	6 bands	NO	2	Two Year
Sonic Innovations	Innova	16 channels	YES	Multiple	Three Year
Sonic Innovations	Applause	16 channels	YES	3	Three Year
Sonic Innovations	Ion	16 channels	YES	3	Two Year
Sonic Innovations	Natura 2 SE	9 channels	YES	2	Three Year
Sonic Innovations	Natura Pro	16 channels	YES	2 or 3	Three Year
Unitron	Indigo	16	YES	4	Two Year
Unitron	Conversa Moda - Open	16	YES	3	Two Year

Hearing Aid Comparison Chart continued

Manufacturer	Model	# Channels	Noise Reduction	# Listening Programs	Manufacturer Warranty
Unitron	Conversa	16	YES	3	Two Year
Unitron	Liaison	16	YES	3	Two Year
Unitron	Element	16, 8 or 4	YES	2-4	Two Year
Oticon	Syncro 2	8 channels - 4 bands	YES	4	Two Year
Oticon	Delta 6000 & 8000	5, 6 or 7 channels	YES	None	Two Year
Oticon	Safran	8 channels	YES	4	Two Year
Oticon	Gaia	2 channels - 7 bands	NO	2	One Year
Oticon	Tego Pro	6 channels	YES - Noise Management	4	Two Year
Oticon	Tego	4 channels	YES - Noise Management	3	One Year
Audibel	Hear Stic	3 channels - OPEN	YES	None	One Year
Audibel	Eclipse 3	4 channels - 8 bands	YES	3	One Year
Audibel	Virtue 4	4 channels - 8 bands	YES	2	One Year
Audibel	Virtue 8	8 channels - 10 bands	YES	3	Two Year
Audibel	Virtue 12	8 channels - 12 bands	YES	3	Two Year
Audibel	Juno	2 channels	NO	3	One Year
Beltone	Edge	3 channels - OPEN	YES	None	14 months
Beltone	Oria	12 channels	YES	3	14 months
Beltone	Mira	6 channels	Low level	2	14 months
Beltone	The One	17 channels	YES	4	Two Year
Beltone	LinQ	9 channels	YES	2	Two Year
Bernafon	Swiss Ear - Open	"channel free"	YES	1	Two Year
Bernafon	Symbio XT	"channel free"	YES	1	Two Year
Interton	Bionic	32	YES	3	Three Year
Miracle Ear	ME-900	16 channels	YES	3	Three Year
Miracle Ear	ME-850	12	YES	3	Two Year
Miracle Ear	ME-1	16 channels	YES	4	Three Year
Miracle Ear	ME-3	4 channels	YES	2	Two Year
Rexton	Calibra 3	14	YES	4	Two Year
Rexton	Calibra 2	7	YES	4	Two Year
Rexton	Calibra 1	4	YES	3	One Year

Hearing Aid Comparison Chart continued

Manufacturer	Model	# Channels	Noise Reduction	# Listening Programs	Manufacturer Warranty
Starkey	Destiny 1200	8 channels - 12 bands	YES	3	One Year
Starkey	Destiny 800	8 channels - 10 bands	YES	3	One Year
Starkey	Destiny 400	4 channels - 8 bands	YES	2	One Year
Starkey	Aspect	3 channels	YES	1	One Year
Starkey Axent II	4 channels -	YES 8 bands	3	One Year	
Starkey	Axent III	4 channels - 8 bands	YES	3	One Year
Starkey	Arista	3 channels - 7 bands	YES	3	One Year
Starkey	Mesa	2 channels	YES	3	One Year
Vivatone-call for info					
Widex	Inteo	15 channels	YES	up to 5	Two Year
Widex	Diva	15 channels - 15 bands	YES	4	Two Year
Widex	Diva Elan	15 channels - OPEN	YES	Auto	Two Year
Widex	Senso Plus	3 channels	speech enhancement	1	Two Year
Widex	Vita	3 channels	YES	4	Two Year
Widex	Vita Elan	3 channels - OPEN	YES	2	Two Year

*Revised October 06
Information believed accurate, subject to change without notice*