

# When It Comes to Hearing Aids Priorities Count

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If you're just starting your research on an upcoming hearing aid purchase, first congratulations on taking that first, all-important step toward a better quality of life. You're going to love what you hear. Second, you may not love the price tag that comes with it but please keep reading. Hearing aids are a worthy investment for you and those you loved.

## Hearing Aids: The Cost of Quality

Whether we're talking about cars, clothes or hearing aids, quality costs more. You've learned that after a few years of shopping for cars and clothes, but hearing aids, well, this may be your first foray into hearing technology, so prepare yourself.

Prepare yourself for sticker shock. Hearing aids – good ones – are going to set you back some, and we're not talking about those tacky ear amps they sell on TV so “you can watch TV without disturbing your partner. ONLY \$14.95!!!!”

These personal sound amplifiers (PSA) are devices that are intended for people with little to no hearing loss to aid in various recreational activities, not to amplify for hearing loss.

PSAs have become so popular lately the FDA recently felt it necessary to clarify for consumers the difference between a PSA and a hearing aid in order to protect consumers.

You see PSAs are adjusted by the user who is naturally going to crank up the volume to a comfortable listening level. These devices are one size fit all meaning for one person they may become too loud and potentially harm your hearing.

In a study at Michigan State University, they found cheap hearing aid like PSA devices were directly correlated to low consumer satisfaction and are potentially harmful to hearing.

So forget the PSA gizmos if you have a true diagnosed hearing loss. They make a bad situation worse. If you want a hearing solution – one that you can live with, one that actually improves life's quality – it's going to cost a few bucks. And if you go for all the goodies available with state-of-the-art hearing aid technology, it'll cost you more than a few bucks.

The first thing you want are hearing aid that can be “tuned” specifically for your hearing loss and hearing needs by an licensed hearing aid professional, such as an audiologist or hearing aid specialist. Quality digital hearing aids – even at the economy level – come with advanced settings that allow amplification based on the sounds in your environment and your precise listening needs.

Quality costs in all things. With hearing aids, the price ranges between \$1000-4000 per hearing aid. And when looking at price, always double that since you should always buy a pair. Listening with two

hearing aids allows you to enjoy a better listening experience and you won't strain the unaided ear any more than necessary. So, be prepared to purchase two hearing aids. And be prepared to pay for quality.

## **Prioritize Your Hearing Loss Needs**

A common question among consumer is “what are the best hearing aids?” Truly there is no one best hearing aid – there are many. Sure the more expensive the hearing aid the more features and options it will come with. However, the best hearing aids are hearing aids that are chosen based on your unique hearing loss, hearing needs and priorities.

Begin by writing down the listening situations that you would like to improve your hearing in, all of them. Be sure to include everything from eating at a restaurant to playing cards with friends or talking on the phone. The more active of lifestyle you lead, the more sophisticated hearing aid you will need.

In addition decide what you want and your budget. Discuss your issues, needs, wants and budget with your hearing aid professional. They will help guide you in selecting the best hearing aids for you.

So, what things should you consider when shopping for your first set of hearing aids, or looking to replace the pair that you've enjoyed all these years? Well, the considerations run the gamut and, as a well-educated consumer, you can determine where your hearing aid dollars should be spent.

Which features are important to you?

## **Self-Esteem**

Call it self-image or self-confidence, but the fact is there's a stigma in some people's minds about hearing aids. If you wear a hearing aid, you must be old, feeble, “broken.” Of course, people don't feel that way about eyeglasses, but for some reason, there are lots of people who want to keep their hearing loss a secret. “Hearing aid wearer” is NOT part of their self image.

No problem. Hearing aids come in a variety of styles and sizes for those looking for a discreet fit. Completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids slip into the ear canal and are nearly invisible. Then, there are the latest in behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids that are light and powerful. The popular open-fit BTEs or receiver-in-the-canal (RIC) hearing aids both rest snug behind the outer ear and utilize a thin transparent tube to deliver sound into the ear. This allows for a discrete fit that often goes unnoticed by others.

So, if you're concerned about how others will see you with hearing aids, don't sweat the small stuff. You can go even smaller in the style of hearing aids you choose.

## **Hearing Aids and Wearing Comfort**

Some people don't feel comfortable wearing a CIC or other custom made hearing aid because it blocks natural sound. CICs may create a “stuffy ear” feeling. If you are one that does not like the thought of something in your ear, discuss with your hearing aid professional if you are a candidate for an open-fit

hearing aid. These allow for the ear canal to stay fairly opening – allowing a more natural and organic feel.

Or perhaps you wear eyeglasses and can't think of adding another gizmo behind the ear, then consider trying a custom made in-the-ear hearing aid. They come in a variety of sizes and depending upon your hearing loss and dexterity there is one to fit your needs.

## **Hearing Aids and Lifestyle Factors**

Head to a hot and humid climate in the winter where you do lots of biking? Hitting the tennis courts each morning? Or maybe you run marathons. All of these things should be considered by you and the hearing aid professional before you make a purchase.

Sure, you can purchase a water-resistant hearing aid with a special membrane to keep out water, but why pay for that feature if you aren't ever going to use it? If you lead an active life – playing golf, jogging in the morning or just out and about, buy hearing aids that reduce wind noise and protect against moisture build-up.

If you lead a quiet, sedate life, you may not need extra features and technology to get you through the day.

Be sure to talk to your hearing aid professional about your lifestyle – and choose a pair of hearing aids that fit your lifestyle. You can save yourself some money or on the flipside you can buy the most state of the art hearing aids to keep you on top of your game.

## **Automated Hearing Aid Features**

Advancements in digital technology have brought a variety of automated features to hearing aids – automatic volume control, automatic directional microphones, even hearing aids that learn your listening preferences and adjust to your liking.

If you don't want to fuss with your hearing aids, automation equals convenience and money well spent. Put in your hearing aids each morning and take them out at night. Simple.

On the other hand, if you don't mind making a manual adjustment, flipping a little switch or scrolling a little volume control wheel, there are quality hearing aids that put you in charge of what you hear.

## **Hearing Aids and Wireless Connectivity**

Are you glued to a cell phone a couple of hours a day on the road? Does your PDA ring every 10 minutes? Do you have a music device like an iPod you enjoy listening to?

Today's hearing aids offer wireless connectivity to Bluetooth compatible devices so you can stay in touch with family, friends and the folks back in the main office using your hearing aids as a wireless receiver so you hear the conversation directly through the hearing aids.

This eliminates problems of feedback (whistling) and fumbling to get that Blackberry hooked up so you can carry on a conversation or text your best friends.

On the other hand, if you're still using a rotary dial telephone and you have no idea what a Blackberry is (it's more than a tasty fruit, you know) or what Bluetooth technology is, then why spend extra for wireless connectivity? You won't use it so you don't need it.

## **The Right Fit for You**

All of these are important considerations when making a hearing aid purchase. Don't buy features you don't or won't use; do buy the features that will truly make your life better. Self-image, wearing comfort, connectivity, automation, your lifestyle – all of these should be considered before you buy any hearing aid. If you can afford the top of the line, why not – you will have the most sophisticated hearing aid on the market. However if you are on a budget, know there are options for you and your decision should be made based on exactly what you need and will use.

Buy the right hearing aids to fit you and your life. You'll get more from the listening experience, you'll feel better about yourself and you'll get the perfect fit at the perfect price.

Talk to your hearing aid professional about all of these things and together you'll choose hearing aids that do what you need them to do, to hear well like you once did.

Oh, and you'll enjoy the sounds around you everyday, and that's something on which you just can't put a price.

Contributor

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