

Wireless Connectivity



International Symbol for Hearing Access;
T= hearing loop

Wireless technology can greatly enhance the usefulness of hearing aids, particularly with assistive listening systems, and especially where hearing loops are installed. It is also helpful for watching TV or using a cellphone. Be sure to ask your provider for an actual demonstration.

Telecoils and Bluetooth are two optional hearing aid components that allow you to connect wirelessly. Bluetooth may be used to connect to cellphones, tablets, and TVs. Telecoils are used to connect to assistive listening systems (ALS), hearing assistive devices and telephones. ALSs allow people to hear clearly and understand dialogue in assembly areas where audible communication is integral to the use of the space. To name a few: courtrooms, legislative chambers, performing arts centers, auditoriums, convention centers, transportation hubs, medical facilities, information counters and places of worship.

These components usually cannot be added to hearing aids after purchase. Consumer advocates recommend you get both.

Telecoils—an essential hearing aid feature that is available on most hearing aids for little or no additional cost. When the t-coil is activated, it receives sound wirelessly from assistive listening systems.

Bluetooth—connects directly to a variety of electronic devices including cell phones, tablets and remote microphones. Generally, these wireless options connect only one person to one sound source, and are manufacturer specific. Bluetooth wireless options can add to the cost of hearing aids.

If this all sounds a bit challenging, consider becoming involved in a local hearing loss support organization such as the Hearing Loss Association of America, where experienced hearing aid users willingly share their practical knowledge and experience.



For nationwide information:
www.hearingloss.org

For local support:
www.hearingloss-wa.org

Some components in this flyer were created with permission from The Advisory Committee for Hearing Loss Awareness of the New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability and the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons. 8.22.18

Buying Hearing Aids in Washington (What to expect)

Audiologists and Hearing Aid Specialists are licensed to sell hearing aids in Washington. Both are trained to test hearing and fit and adjust hearing aids. Audiologists have a Master's or doctoral degree in audiology. They are trained to interpret test results from a medical perspective and to use advanced testing to determine the need for further medical treatment. Hearing Aid Specialists are qualified to fit and adjust hearing aids and to recognize problems that require referral to an audiologist or medical doctor. Your primary care physician and people you know who use hearing aids may be good people to ask for a referral.



The Hearing Evaluation

A screening or hearing exam—Hearing screenings are quick pass/fail tests designed to let you know if you need further hearing evaluation. Hearing exams determine the degree, type and configuration of your hearing loss. They are conducted in a sound proof booth, and must be done prior to your being fitted with hearing aids. A proper hearing exam will include testing your comprehension of spoken words, and should include **Speech in Noise** testing as well.

Your audiogram—An audiogram is a graph that displays the results of the hearing exam. Pure tone audiometry is used to identify hearing thresholds (the softest heard) at different pitches in both ears. An audiogram also displays comprehension results of spoken words in both quiet and in noise. Pure tone and speech comprehension audiometry, as depicted on an audiogram, provide information needed for proper hearing aid fitting.

Types of Hearing Loss

Sensorineural Hearing Loss occurs when the the cochlea and/or the auditory nerve is damaged or malfunctioning, making it unable to accurately send information to the brain. Almost always permanent, nearly always improved with modern hearing aids.

Conductive Hearing Loss occurs when there is a problem with the Outer or Middle Ear that interferes with sound passing to the Inner Ear. Causes include infections, impacted ear wax (cerumen), fluid buildup, a damaged eardrum, or abnormal bone growth in the Middle Ear. An exam by an Ear-Nose & Throat (ENT) physician is suggested.

Mixed Hearing Loss means both Sensorineural and Conductive loss are present. While the sensorineural component is likely permanent, the conductive component may or may not be and warrants an ENT physician examination.

What the Hearing Care Provider Should Review with you:

- The results of the hearing exam as displayed on your audiogram.
- An explanation of why you often can hear but not understand.
- Whether or not you are a hearing aid candidate, along with expectations for hearing aid use in a variety of situations important to you.
- Your lifestyle 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 lifestyle and expectations for hearing and personal preferences regarding style and your budget, your hearing healthcare provider will suggest hearing aids that will suit you best. Your provider will guide you towards establishing several hearing aid outcome goals.

Types of Hearing Aids

There are several styles available, including behind-the-ear, custom in-the-ear, open fit, completely in the canal, and extended wear products. There are options and benefits for each style. Understanding your needs and preferences is important to selecting the best option. **It is very important to understand there are trade offs with some choices because the features available can vary depending on the style.**

Features

What features are available can vary depending on the style and may include:

- Directional microphones that help focus on sound in front of you
- Telecoils that connect you wirelessly to hearing loops and other assistive technologies that enhance hearing in public situations where distance and noise are involved
- Wireless technology that allows hearing aids to connect wirelessly to your cell phone, home TV and clip-on microphone that can be used in cars and in noisy environments
- Remote control and/or apps to use on smart phones
- Special programs that can enhance listening to music, in groups etc.
- Rechargeable batteries
- Manual or automatic controls for volume

Hearing Aid Dispensing

When your new hearing aids are ready, your provider should show you:

- How to place the hearing aids correctly in or on your ears
- How to access different programs that have been customized for your lifestyle as well as how to pair your instrument via an app to your smartphones, TV transmitter or iPad
- How to use the telecoil feature in a 'real life' setting
- How to install and/or charge batteries
- How to clean, store and care for your hearing aids

Counseling at the Time of Dispensing Should Include:

- How to adjust to hearing sounds in your environment
- Strategies to help you hear better in various communication situations
- When and how to use the programs selected for you
- Cleaning any cerumen in your ears or on your hearing aids
- Encouragement to return for adjustments and fine tuning as needed
- Services available to you from state agencies and other organizations
- Referral to local and national support groups

Hearing Aid Verification and Validation Measures

Verification: When fitting your hearing aids, the hearing health care provider should use a Probe-Microphone Test (also called Real Ear Test) to ensure that the hearing aids chosen for you are working properly and are meeting well-researched fitting targets for audibility and comfort. This test is the *only* way to objectively verify the sound levels in your ears.

Validation: Validation is where you and your provider judge whether or not your hearing aid outcome goals have been achieved, and what else needs to be done, if anything, to improve your ability to hear in all important situations of your life. Validation is done after you have used your hearing aids for several weeks and should still give you time to decide if you want to keep your hearing aids or return them for your money back minus any agreed-upon non-refundable fee.

Sales Contract

Washington State law requires you receive a contract when you purchase your hearing aids. The contract must contain the make and model of your hearing aids, full financial terms of sale, and a trial period of at least 30 days.

Trial Period

Your hearing aid purchase becomes final in Washington State only after a trial period of at least 30 days. Some providers allow for more time, so ask your provider so that you fully understand the return and refund policy. Be sure to use the trial period productively by trying your hearing aids in different environments and asking questions as needed.

Returning Your Hearing Aids

Washington State law requires that if you return your 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 in the written contract.

Complaints

If you're not happy with your hearing aids, or you and your provider are unable to reconcile your differences, you may file a complaint online with the Washington State Department of Health.

www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/FileComplaintAboutProviderorFacility