How Do I Begin a Hearing Loss Journey?

Do I Really Need Hearing Aids?

☐ NOTE: If you have a sudden hearing loss, treat this as a medical emergency and immediately see an otolaryngologist also known as an ENT (Ears, Nose, Throat medical doctor). Click Here.

☐ You test your eyes...why not your ears? Signs of hearing loss:

- Difficulty following conversations in noisy places
- Turning up the volume more frequently
- Frequently asking others to repeat themselves
- Feeling drained after talking to people
- Voices sound muffled or unclear
- Relaying on facial cues or lip reading

☐ Take this Hearing Inventory Click Here

Testing Your Hearing:

☐ If you hesitate to take a hearing test, you can start with a paper and pencil checklist. Click Here. You can also search for a hearing test online. Click Here

☐ To take a hearing test, you can get a list of audiologists from your health network. See the section “Choosing an Audiologist” below. In addition, remember that Costco and many audiologists offer free hearing tests.

☐ Besides your hearing test, ask for a QuickSIN (SIN=Sound in Noise) test to evaluate your hearing in background noise. This is an audiological “Best Practice”. What is the QuickSIN (QSIN)? Click Here (5 min) Your evaluation should be noted on your audiogram. Here is a chart to compare your numerical results:

SNR-Loss 0-3 dB	Normal/Near Normal
SNR-Loss 3-7 dB	Mild SIN Disability
SNR-Loss 7-15 dB	Moderate SIN Disability
SNR-Loss >15 dB	Severe SIN Disability

☐ Be sure to ask for your audiogram after taking the hearing tests. It is your RX prescription! Remember to keep these audiograms, along with your Questionnaires (referenced below), over the years, to keep track of your hearing profile. How do you read your audiogram? Click Here (5 min)

☐ Is this your first time considering hearing aids? If so, consider an **appointment with an ENT** (Medical Doctor for Ears, Nose, and Throat) to be sure hearing aids are your treatment option. For example, if your hearing loss results from a tumor on the auditory nerve, hearing aids may not be a solution. So, rule out a physical problem for your hearing loss. If you have your audiogram, bring it with you to this appointment to show the ENT doctor.

☐ Putting off hearing aids because you need to think about it?

- First blood-test evidence that treating hearing loss slows brain inflammation (ACHIEVE Trial) Click Here
- Earlier you got the device, the greater the benefit. “Consumer Reports Article” Click Here
- Auditory deprivation can change the brain. It is helpful that hearing aids can promote auditory adaptation and improve access to sound. But complete reversal of past damage has not been established. ChatGPT summary of research: Click Here
- Dr. Cliff Olson weighs in on this subject Click Here (10 min)

☐ Are you aware of the link between untreated hearing loss and dementia? Click Here. For a thorough look at the research, Click Here.

☐ Watch “What to Expect from a Hearing Test”. Click Here

Can You Hear in Background Noise?

☐ If your audiogram is normal, but you cannot hear in background noise, you may have a condition commonly called “hidden hearing loss.” or now known as subclinical hearing loss. This video identifies it as the 4th type of Hearing Loss - Click Here and Click here to read about it.

☐ What is the relationship between cognitive decline and untreated hearing loss? Click Here

Choosing a Hearing Care Professional:

☐ What is an Audiologist (Au.D.)? Click Here

☐ Choosing an Audiologist? First, contact your health insurance to get a list of audiologists participating in your health plan. Here are two sites that list audiologists who follow Best Practices:
- Dr. Cliff Olson, AuD recommended: Click Here
- Dr. Juliëtte Sterkens, AuD recommended: Click Here

☐ COSTCO sells RX (as opposed to Over-the-Counter) hearing aids. Is COSTCO a good option? Click Here.

☐ **“Best Practices”** are more important than best hearing aids. There are many “Best Practices”, but Dr. Olson has highlighted the top 5, which are bookmarked below. You can click on a bookmark number below or see the entire presentation by Clicking Here.

00:00:00 Introduction
00:02:44 How Humans Hear
00:03:44 Audiogram
00:05:49 What Hearing Aids Do
00:06:54 What are Best Practices? Analogy
00:10:40 List of Best Practices
00:12:33 Percentage Audiologists Doing Best Practices

00:13:20 Top 5 Best Practices
00:13:30 Best Practice #1 - Recorded Voice
00:16:50 Best Practice #2 - QuickSIN Test (Speech in Noise)
00:20:07 Best Practice # 3 - Test Box Measures
00:24:21 Best Practice # 4 - Real Ear Measurement (REM)
00:32:17 Why REM helps with Speech In Noise
00:34:03 Research Available on REM
00:35:06 Best Practice # 5 - Validation Measures such as Questionnaires (COSI, APHAB)
00:38:14 APHAB Statistical Analysis
00:38:59 Checklists
00:40:37 Applied 360 Review Offer

☐ The most important is Best Practice #4: Real Ear Measurement. Does your audiologist use it? Click Here to see it in action.

☐ Read an interview on Best Practices: Click Here

☐ Dr. Cliff Olson's Best Practices complete checklist, Click Here

Meeting an Audiologist or Hearing Care Professional:

☐ This tool will come in handy when you need to remember & describe difficult hearing situations with your audiologist. Fill out this APHAB **Questionnaire** to track your hearing experience and bring it with you to your appointment. It will take time to fill out since you need to revisit different situations to gauge your hearing ability. If the situation does not apply to you, cross it out. If not listed, add any situations that apply to you. Click Here - scroll down to hover your cursor over language and click on it to select it to print it out.

☐ Why is important for your audiologist to validate your hearing experience? Click Here

Choosing a Hearing Aid

☐ Each manufacturer process sounds differently so you want to visit an audiologist that offers multiple brands of hearing aids. Your audiologist

should recommend the brand that fits your hearing loss profile. To explore the brands of hearing aids, Click Here.

☐ Test predicts which hearing aid you will like. Click Here

☐ How do you choose the right one? Click Here. Also check out **Consumers Reports** at the library. Click Here

☐ HearAdvisor compares hearing aid sound quality. Click Here

☐ Hearing Aid Guides: 2026
- HearingTracker Click Here
- Dr. Cliff Olson, AuD Click Here

☐ Basic Hearing Aid Questions from NIH Click Here

Which kind of hearing aid to choose: Over-the-Counter (OTC) or Prescription (RX)?

OTC (Over-the-Counter) Hearing Aids

- OTC may apply if you have a mild hearing loss -- check your audiogram.
- TC are less expensive and have less capability than prescription hearing aids. Attend the HLAA Webinar Series on OTC Hearing Aids. Click Here
- From Consumer Reports: How to Tell if OTC Hearing Aids are Right for You. Click Here
- Dr. Cliff Olson evaluates OTC Hearing Aids? Click Here
- American Academy of Audiology FAQ Click Here
- The Best OTC hearing aids: (Be sure to ask about telecoil, explained below.)
  - National Council On Aging - NCOA.org Click Here
  - Consumers Guide Click Here
  - AARP Click Here

RX Hearing Aids

- What is the Best Prescription (RX) Hearing Aid?
    - Dr. Cliff Olson, AuD: Best hearing aids 2026 Click Here
    - HearingTracker: Best hearing aids 2026 Click Here
    - Wirecutter – New York Times Click Here

- What level of hearing aid technology should you get? Click Here

- Locked vs. Unlocked Hearing Aids – know the difference! Click Here

Purchasing Your Hearing Aids:

☐ Ask about the warranty, cost (hearing aid plus professional services), and return period for a full refund. Washington state requires a minimum 30-day trial period.

☐ Will your Hearing Care Professional provide loaner hearing aids if they are sent in for repair?

☐ Purchasing a Hearing Aid – Checklist Click Here

☐ Understand Hearing Aid insurance Click Here

☐ Dr. Cliff Olson, AuD, has several videos that involve the cost of hearing aids. Click here and scroll to click on the videos that interest you.

☐ Do you need financial help in purchasing hearing aids? Click Here

Assistive Technology

☐ To "future proof" your hearing aids you need to incorporate assistive technology. You may not need it today, but it will be invaluable as you age and need more help from your hearing aids.

☐ Does your audiologist tell you about Assistive Technology such as **telecoil, Bluetooth & Auracast?** All three turn your hearing aids into headphones, streaming the sound into your hearing aids. You need all the technologies since they operate in different hearing environments. Washington State law requires hearing care professionals to educate you on assistive technology. Click Here to read Bill SB5210

☐ It is imperative to ask if your hearing aids will be Auracast ready? This is a new Bluetooth technology that will be prevalent soon. Click here to watch 1 hour video to understand Auracast.

Telecoil:

☐ If the telecoil has not been activated in your hearing aids, ask your hearing aid provider to do this. Be sure to ask how to turn it on and off. **You** test it in their office!

☐ To use telecoil you need to be inside a hearing loop. There are many kinds of hearing loops: room installed loops, neckloops, lap-pad loops, portable counter loops, etc.

☐ You can use telecoil to help you hear with greater clarity and in background noise, both in public and in private/home environments.

- Using telecoil at home: Click Here. At home you connect a neckloop to your device's 3.5 mm audio port (sometimes called a headphone jack) - for example, your TV or computer. (A ClearSounds CLA7v2 neckloop can be checked-out at the Panorama Library.)
- Using telecoil in a public venue: Click Here.
- Using telecoil to stream the PA sound into your hearing aids in some of Panorama's meeting rooms, refer to the February 2026 Panorama News Bulletin, page 14.

☐ Does your telecoil work? You can test your telecoil at 1751 Panorama Reception Desk using their Counter Loop, a device sitting on the counter. Be sure Counter Loop is turned on (see blue light). With the receptionist at back and you at front, turn on your telecoil. Speak to the receptionist

facing the Counter Loop. A Counter Loop can be checked out at the Panorama Library.

☐ Be sure the audiologist programs **2 settings** for telecoil: one for telecoil sound only - with no background sound and the other setting for telecoil + hearing aid activated sound. The 'telecoil only' setting will block out background noise, giving a noise-canceling effect. The other setting will allow you to talk to others while listening to the telecoil input. For additional information, here is a card to hand to your audiologist Click Here

Bluetooth:

☐ Be sure your audiologist pairs your hearing aids to your smartphone so you can answer your cellphone calls by streaming calls into your hearing aids.

☐ Ask about pairing other Bluetooth devices to your hearing aids, such as TV's, computers, etc.

Auracast:

☐ How to use Auracast with Hearing Aids Click Here

☐ Be sure your hearing aids have Auracast installed or are at least "Auracast ready". . Click Here This new emerging Bluetooth low energy technology will be here soon.

- You can use it now for your TV if you have telecoil, neckloop & an audio port on your TV. Just buy the Transmitter (to connect to the TV) and the Receiver (to connect to your neckloop) and turn on your telecoil! You will be hearing the TV via Auracast, stream to your hearing aids. Click Here.

Hearing Aid Fitting Appointment

☐ What are the five things to expect at a Hearing Aid fitting appointment? Click Here

☐ Watch “Real Ear Measurement” (REM), listed above and “Real Ear Measurement vs. Auto First Fit” Click Here and do it now since this will happen at this appointment.

☐ To get additional information on doing “Real Ear Measurement” correctly. Click Here

Follow Up Appointments

☐ First day after you receive your hearing aids – what to expect, Click Here

☐ Fill out this APHAB questionnaire (see above) again to assess your hearing experience and compare it with your previous questionnaires. Has there been an improvement in your hearing experience? If not, work with your hearing aid dispenser to discuss and resolve this.

☐ How to Make Your Hearing Aids Sound Clearer Click Here

☐ 6 Tips to Make Your Hearing Aids Work Better Click Here

☐ 4 Reasons Why Follow-Up Care is so Critical Click Here

How Much has your Hearing Changed over Time?
Do you Need Cochlear Implants?

☐ Calculate your Hearing Number? ? Click Here
- What is it used for? Click Here
  - Track hearing ability over time.
  - Do I need to consider an evaluation for Cochlear Implants?
  - Do I need to consider more use of technology?
- What is your Hearing Number? Click Here
- Compute your Hearing Number Click Here
  - Use your audiogram-scroll to bottom of page.
- Use your Hearing Number Click Here
- Resources Click Here
- Hearing Number Handout - Fact Sheet Click Here

Hearing Number	Broad hearing category
Below 20 dB	Generally considered within normal range
20–34 dB	Mild hearing loss
35–49 dB	Moderate hearing loss
50–64 dB	Moderately severe
65–79 dB	Severe

Future of Hearing Aids:
Solving the Brain Connection CLICK HERE

YOUTUBE TIPS:

Many links involve YouTube – here are some helpful tips:

First, go to the video you want to hear, then:

1) After 5 seconds go to bottom right area and click on “Skip Ad”
2) To click and pause the video, hover the cursor on the lower left.
3) Hover your cursor at the bottom right; click on settings (gear icon).
   a. Click on Subtitles to use captions.
   b. Click on arrow next to Speed; Click on .75 to slow down the audio.
4) Click on Play (arrow) to continue seeing video (which now slows down the talking and/or shows captions)