



What to Know Before Buying a Hearing Aid.

By Diane Nens, Audiologist and Senior Clinical Director, UnitedHealthcare Hearing.

Hearing loss is the third most common chronic condition among older Americans, affecting more than [48 million people](#) nationwide. Hearing loss may [become even more widespread](#) in the future, in part because of an aging population and the frequent use of ear bud headphones, which can contribute to noise-induced hearing loss.

Hearing loss may affect a person's ability to stay connected to friends and family, contributing to [social isolation, depression](#) and [higher risk of falls](#).

About [80% of people who could benefit from using a hearing aid do not actually use them](#), often because of cost, limited knowledge, or lack of access to a hearing health professional. As a result, the average person who may have hearing loss [waits seven years before seeking treatment](#).

Before purchasing a hearing aid.

There are many important factors to consider. Here are five tips when evaluating hearing aids:

1 Look for these key features:

- **Custom-programming** – The sound processor inside the hearing aid is programmed to the user's hearing test results.
- **Automatic gain control** – Enabling the user to hear soft sounds while keeping loud noises at a comfortable level.
- **Directional processing** – Enhances the sounds in front of the user while reducing distracting background noise from beside and behind.
- **Feedback manager** – Allows for greater amplification without whistling.
- **Noise reduction** – Improves listening comfort and speech intelligibility by reducing distracting environmental noise such as fans or motors.
- **Telecoil** – Connects to telephones, hearing loops, neck loops and wireless systems.



2 Have reasonable expectations.

Hearing aids can't completely restore normal hearing or eliminate all background noise, but they can improve the quality of life for users by making speech easier to hear, amplifying soft sounds and reducing loud background noises. For people using hearing aids for the first time, it may take some time before users become completely comfortable with them. People should be patient as they adjust to hearing sounds for the first time in what may be years.

3 Evaluate home-delivery options.

Some [new regulations](#) and companies are changing the way hearing aids are sold, helping to bring down costs. Through home-delivery options, people may be able to purchase high-quality, custom-programmed [hearing aids for less than \\$1,000 per device](#) – a savings of 60 percent or more compared to devices sold through traditional channels.

As technology has improved and programming has become more precise, people with hearing test results may be able to order custom-programmed hearing aids and have them conveniently delivered to their doorstep, potentially avoiding the need for in-person appointments with hearing health professionals.

4 Consider other hearing products.

In conjunction with hearing aids, there are assistive listening devices that may remove distracting background noise and bring relevant sounds closer to the user. Devices such as neck loops, wireless systems, or loops that can be installed in rooms may help transmit sounds directly to hearing aid users, helping improve the sound quality and clarity, especially when listening at a distance.

5 Check with your insurance plan.

Some insurance plans, including employer-sponsored and Medicare Advantage plans, may cover some or all of the cost of hearing aids, helping to make treatment and support more affordable. Check with your health plan to see what coverage may be available.



A quick, simple hearing test.

An online hearing test can tell you how well you're hearing and whether you should schedule an in-person hearing test with your local hearing provider. To take the test right from the comfort of your home, just visit UHChearing.com/test.

Questions?

Call UnitedHealthcare Hearing at **1-855-523-9355, TTY 711**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT.

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