HEARING AID BUYERS GUIDE for the Self-Funded Australian

A Practical Guide to Obtaining the Best Outcome and Value for Your Money

Christo Fourie, Clinical Audiologist
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by

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Foreword
by Christo Fourie
BCommunication Pathology (RSA, Pretoria), MAudA (CCP) (Audiologist)

PURCHASING hearing aids can be an unnecessarily confusing and frustrating process. No one actually WANTS hearing aids. What you REALLY want is the feeling of confidence when you speak to strangers. Or the positive emotions it brings you, like clearly hearing a grandchild’s voice or being able to engage socially with friends.

You want a satisfactory long-term outcome, something that improves your hearing with the least amount of hassles, not a product.

Untreated hearing loss has been linked to dementia, depression, anxiety, reduced income potential, social isolation and more. So getting the right hearing solution, one that you are willing to wear and delivers optimal results, is critical. Especially considering that the choice you make will have to last around 5 years on average.

Getting to the point where hearing aids deliver on the promise of allowing you to re-engage with the sounds and people you want can be a perilous journey. Sometimes you are lucky in finding the right provider and right solution to achieve this, and sometimes not.

When there is so much information out there, it is hard to know where to start or to finish. What’s worse is that each person is uniquely different, so you cannot even rely on what has worked for others.

This guide is designed to take LUCK out of the equation and give you the best chance possible of finding a solution that will work for your unique situation, using facts and measurable evidence.

Mark White, a client of ours in Perth, puts this nicely in his own words:

It can be a very daunting experience to go through the process of trying to select the right ones.
I can honestly tell you I was very reluctant to get hearing aids and held back for several years and guessing I’m not the only one out there to do so.

During this time I went to several Audiologist Clinics to get my hearing checked thinking it may not be that bad and do I really need them. Unfortunately, I came out of each one not feeling that confident at all and if the hearing aids recommended for me were really the right ones I needed.

I came across an advertisement for Value Hearing and thought to give it another go.

My appointment was with Alisha and I mentioned to her about my previous experiences at several Audiologists and that I also have tinnitus. Alisha actually took the time to explain in length and show me an animated working version of the inner ear and also as to why my tinnitus gave me buzzing noises.

Value Hearing was the only Audiologist Clinic that explained all this to me. A very big thank you to all the staff at Value Hearing Perth WA for being so understanding, friendly, polite and caring.

I look forward to seeing you all again at my next visit.
I have worked as an Audiologist in the Australian hearing aid industry since 2001 for a variety of retailers, big and small, independent and not. During this time, I have seen and heard it all.

I started out quite naive, thinking that like myself, anyone involved in the industry would be dedicated to delivering the best client outcomes, while continually working on professional development and finding ways to improve client outcomes. Unfortunately I was mistaken. More on this later.

In 2009 I decided to go it on my own, as I noticed that there was a mismatch between what was promised and what was delivered. I developed a way of serving my clients that would change things for the better.

This is when things started getting really interesting.

I quickly found competitors, and even suppliers, trying to strangle my fledgling business. For them, it was all about the money. I fought, persevered, and, in the process, opened the market to much more healthy competition. Hence you can see lower prices more readily available today than in 2009.

While doing this, I refined the hearing aid provision model to improve all aspects of service provision to truly deliver on the name Value Hearing. This book is not to promote Value Hearing. However, if you are interested, you can read the Value Hearing Story on our web site - www.valuehearing.com.au.

Purpose of this book

This book has been written to share what I have learned with the Australian public and to help you quickly navigate an evermore confusing journey to better hearing.

My purpose is to empower you to succeed in your search for better engagement, confidence and general well-being through better hearing.

Whether you are a new user looking to get hearing aids for the first time, or an existing user looking to upgrade your hearing aids, there is something in here for everyone.

I understand that I cannot personally help every person with hearing loss find their best solution; one which will deliver optimal results over the long term. My company, Value Hearing, is my attempt at directly influencing as many Australians with hearing loss as possible, but even this is insufficient.

Firstly, not everyone is a match for us or our services, despite us having several locations across Australia. Secondly, we aren't yet in a sufficient number of locations to help everyone who needs our type of guidance.

As such, I have designed this guide to take all the best practices, combined with my insights into the internal workings of the industry, and make them available to you. This way you stand a much better chance of finding your right solution for you quickly, while hopefully avoiding the all the hidden pitfalls.

I will be as objective as possible in what follows. I certainly don't mind being controversial and open when it is required.

How to use this book

This book is designed as a step-by-step guide to helping you find your ideal hearing solution quickly. I define an ideal solution as: the simplest solution which will address your hearing loss effectively, without you having to overspend on features you don't need or that won't benefit you.

An ideal solution should continue delivering improved hearing, with the quality of life benefits associated with better hearing, not only during the honeymoon period, but also for
years to come. An ideal solution does not just consist of a specific hearing aid model, but can only be achieved with cooperation with your hearing health professional.

For those exploring hearing aid options for the first time, I recommend reading this guide from start to finish.

For those looking to find a new provider or considering whether to upgrade their existing hearing aids, you can use the index of this book to find only those areas of interest to you.

Our website is regularly updated with useful information on the models of hearing aids and helpful tips on how to get the most from your hearing.


While there, you are always welcome to sign-up to my newsletter, where I publish all my latest articles if you wish to stay on top of developments. I have also added a section at the end of this book which lists several other articles you may find helpful in your journey to better hearing.

I wish you safe and happy travels!

Christo Fourie
Introduction
Introduction

It has been reported in Australia that your chances of giving up on your hearing aids, within the first year or so of purchasing them, is around 33%. This is a shocking statistic and certainly does not instill much confidence in hearing aids or the industry. This is especially true considering what hearing aids can cost.

Fortunately, this is just the average. By following this guide, you can increase your chances of success dramatically, shifting from a reliance on pure luck, to taking control of your hearing health in an informed manner.

I have done in-house research on thousands of clients in my own company, Value Hearing, to see how our processes compare.

I found that our non-use rate as measured over eight (8) years is only 4.36% and steadily improving. That is despite considering non-use for our purposes at less than 2 hours use a day.

This has been achieved by having a very clear client journey in place. This client journey involves specific processes, combined with active recalls, to ensure our clients receive not only immediate benefit, but ongoing benefit over the life of the instrument.

You can read more about Value Hearing’s Client Journey on our website and download a copy if you are interested.

You can compare our journey to the the journey of the company you choose to work with. This alone could dramatically increase your chances of success.

JUST BECAUSE A COMPANY IS LARGE, DOES NOT MEAN IT HAS A CLEARLY DEFINED CLIENT JOURNEY. ASK TO SEE THEIR CLIENT JOURNEY PLAN.
This guide is intended to help you, the Australian hearing aid buyer, obtain your best value solution, capable of delivering optimal outcome immediately, and over the long term.

The book contains very important and logical steps to guide you through this process, from determining whether you are ready for hearing devices, all the way through to getting your devices fitted and followed-up to your satisfaction.

You might also find our free Six Step Checklist to Discovering Your Ideal Hearing Solution helpful. It summarises all the key points in this book into a short checklist to guide you through the steps.
Feel free to download our Six Step Checklist to Discovering Your Ideal Hearing Solution.
How You Can Tell If You Have Hearing Loss
How You Can Tell If You Have Hearing Loss

Before we get into the world of audiology and hearing aids, let’s begin at the beginning, and start with the most obvious question: do you have hearing loss? It might be difficult to tell.

Without testing, there is no real definitive way to be sure. However, there are clues that tell you that not all is right with your hearing.

Let’s look at some of these.

**Do you have tinnitus?**

Tinnitus refers to any intermittent or continuous noises (hissing or buzzing for examples) or ringing in one ear (or both) or head experienced by a person in the absence of external noise.

Tinnitus is usually a symptom of problems in the hearing system (outer, middle or inner ears). Tinnitus as a symptom of sensorineural hearing loss means that there is some damage to the hair cells of the inner ear, and can often be experienced before a hearing loss is detected.

**Do you have difficulties hearing and following conversations in noisy environments?**

Hearing speech in the presence of background noise tends to be the most commonly reported difficulty for people with hearing loss, and is often the main complaint from people with slight or mild hearing problems.

High frequency hearing loss (loss of high-pitched sounds in hearing) is quite common and it is the high pitched sounds of speech that give us cues to hear speech clearly. Once background noise is added to the mixture, hearing someone clearly can be made exponentially more difficult if you have even a slight hearing loss.

**Do you have difficulties hearing softly spoken people, whispers or sounds/speech from a distance?**

As with the above point, the clarity of speech comes from hearing the high pitched sounds, so if you have a hearing loss, it is common to miss out on these important cues, so people can sound like they’re mumbling.

**Do you have difficulties hearing women’s or children’s voices?**

As discussed, the high pitched sounds are often the first to deteriorate as we age, so hearing and understanding what women with higher-pitched voices or children can be difficult.

**Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?**

If you can’t hear someone clearly, you will find yourself saying ‘what?’ or ‘huh?’ and generally asking for someone to repeat themselves.
Even people with hearing in the normal range will sometimes require someone to repeat themselves, but if you have hearing problems, you will find yourself asking for repeats more often. Our family and friends will quite often be the first to notice this as well, and might become annoyed at having to constantly repeat themselves.

**Do you often find you’ve misunderstood a conversation and/or responded inappropriately?**

Our brains quite often try to work harder to help us understand what we might not have heard by filling in the blanks. However, it doesn’t always get this right. Missing the clarity of words might mean that words like ‘feet’, ‘heat’, and ‘seat’ for example, might sound the same to you. If you’ve misunderstood what someone has said because you haven’t heard them clearly, you might think the conversation is about something else entirely and respond inappropriately.

**Do you find yourself straining to hear conversations and feel more tired after doing so?**

When hearing loss starts to occur, your brain tries to help you compensate by utilising other cues such as visual cues or contextual cues to help you follow a conversation. This often means that you’re consciously or subconsciously working harder to follow and understand conversations, which can be exhausting after a while.

**Do you have difficulties following a conversation if two or more people are talking at the same time?**

Once again, your brain is working harder to try to follow a conversation, but if there are competing sounds such as background noise or multiple conversations, it can be very difficult to ignore some of those sounds.

**Do you get complaints that the television is turned up too loud?**

This is often a common complaint from family members of people with hearing difficulties. You might even find that increasing the television volume makes the sound louder, but not necessarily any clearer and easier to understand.

**Do you have difficulties hearing someone over the telephone?**

Different people speak differently over the phone, so it can sometimes be more difficult to understand someone over the telephone, but if you’re finding that this is becoming increasingly worse for you, you may have a hearing problem. When we use the telephone, we’re relying on our hearing, as there are no visual cues to help us out.

Please note that the above material is for general information only – it is recommended that if you answered yes to two or more of the above points, then you may wish to consult a hearing specialist to have your hearing checked to confirm if you have a hearing problem and for advice regarding your options. You may also like to screen your hearing using our online hearing check tool, which can be found here: [https://bit.ly/2YYMdO0](https://bit.ly/2YYMdO0)
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How Do You Know If You Need Hearing Aids?
How Do You Know If You Need Hearing Aids?

For most people, hearing problems develop gradually, usually over a period of years. Due to its slow rate of deterioration, it can be difficult to recognise the signs of hearing loss when they first appear. It's often the family and friends closest to you who become frustrated about your hearing; after all, you can't miss what you can't hear.

How we hear

Before you can understand hearing loss, we need to understand a little about how we hear.

The ear is divided into 3 (three) sections – the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear.

The outer ear (A) consists of the ear canal and eardrum. Sounds travelling down the ear canal need to make it up to the eardrum, which causes it to vibrate and send these sounds through to the middle ear.

The middle ear (B) contains a chain of three small bones that connect the eardrum through to the opening to the inner ear. When the eardrum vibrates, the three bones continue to send the series of vibrations through to the inner ear, which is filled with fluid.

The inner ear (C) contains the permanent hearing organ called the cochlea. The vibrations from the middle ear causes the inner ear fluid to move, which causes the hair cells lining the inside of the cochlea to move. This movement sends an electrical impulse up the hearing nerve to the brain for the sounds to be processed.

Therefore, hearing is about how the three sections of the ear work together to transmit sounds, and how the brain works to process those sounds.

Hearing loss can occur when there is a break down in how these sounds are transmitted. Permanent, or sensorineural, hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the hair cells in the cochlea of the inner ear.

Hearing vs Listening

**Hearing** is access to acoustic information.

**Listening**, however, requires attention and intention.

Normal hearing alone does not assure that one is a good listener.

We all know people who have normal hearing but are lousy listeners. Conversely, many of our patients have impaired hearing, yet are wonderful listeners. Listening is a skill that requires effort, and for a person with a hearing loss, that effort must be particularly concentrated.

The ear basically acts like a microphone to the brain. The brain is where hearing aid listening actually takes place.

You don't actually “hear” a sound until the brain’s hearing centres receive electrical signals from the ear, process those signals and generate some reaction – like getting out of the way of an oncoming car as you cross the street.

“We hear with our brains, not with our ears.”
Did you know that not only does the hearing nerves weaken over time, but also the hearing centres of the brain tend to weaken as a result of auditory deprivation?

In other words, by delaying the hearing impaired ear with adequate stimulation, there is a likelihood that the brain's hearing centres become lazy and therefore alters the brain ability to correctly process speech.

As advanced as hearing aid technology has become, hearing aids alone cannot produce the listening skills or comprehension needed for communication. Hearing aids are designed to provide access to as much acoustic information as possible, but they do not directly modify the user's behaviours.

In essence, introducing sound to an auditory system that has been deprived of sound is likely to alter the way in which sounds are perceived and represented by the ear.

The brain will rewire to get more information from another sense when it is missing from one sense.

Studies have shown that even with mild hearing loss, the brain rewire to make more use of the eyes to aid with lipreading. The connection to the hearing part of the brain weakens when this happens.

This means that the speed of processing slows down, as the information has to travel much further to interpret than before. It also means that you may have problems hearing someone if they aren't looking at you.

**Two hearing aids or one hearing aid?**

Another cause of auditory deprivation is single-ear hearing aid use.

This asymmetrical setup causes one ear to take on more of the listening activity than the other, weakening the unaided ear over time.

You may have saved a few bucks by purchasing a single hearing aid rather than a pair, but you are depriving one ear from sound and causing the nerves on that ear to slowly weaken.

*Bottom line?* Over time, that unaided ear is going to lose more and more functionality and when you do get around to buying a pair of hearing aids or adding a second hearing aid, that unaided ear will have a harder time adapting to sound.

And get this – the recovery of the hearing centres of the brain also weaken slowly over time. Starting to get the picture?

*Why?* Well, when the hearing nerves and the areas of the brain responsible for hearing are deprived of sound, they atrophy – weaken – making recovery from hearing loss through mechanical means, aka: a hearing aid, that much more difficult. The fancy term used by hearing professionals is auditory deprivation.

The key to hearing better longer is to keep the hearing part of the brain active and NOT let it atrophy. Through the use of hearing aids – early, when you first notice hearing loss – you’ll enjoy a better quality of hearing longer.

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**Buyer's Tip**

YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN RECOMMENDED A HEARING AID THAT WILL NOT ONLY WORK WELL FOR YOU IN QUIET, BUT ALSO IN NOISE. PEOPLE WHO DO NOT FIND BENEFIT IN NOISE TEND TO REMOVE THEM IN THESE SITUATIONS INITIALLY AND END UP LATER NOT WEARING THEM AT ALL. SO IT IS CRITICAL YOU FIND THE RIGHT HEARING AID.
Preparing to Buy Hearing Aids
Preparing to Buy Hearing Aids

Are you motivated to proceed?

The motivation behind why you are seeking to purchase hearing aids needs to be carefully considered before making this investment.

You need to be sure that you are getting hearing devices because you are choosing to improve your communication and quality of life.

When this is a personal decision, you are more likely to wear your hearing aids correctly, ensuring that you to adapt to them effortlessly.

Sadly, people who get hearing aids solely to please their partner or family, or due to some other outside influence, are more likely to stop wearing them over time.

Hearing aids offer many benefits such as:

- Reduced risk of cognitive decline (hearing aids fix the brain not the ears)
- Improved communication in social environments
- Higher subjective energy levels for the wearer
- Improved confidence
- Better social interactions
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Reduction of depression due to the isolation caused by hearing problems
- Reduction of central (brain) changes due to hearing difficulties, and
- Even higher income potential for the hearing aid wearer compared to people with untreated hearing problems!

It is imperative to take ALL these factors into account when determining your true motivation to improve your hearing.
What are your hearing needs?

An important factor in selecting a suitable hearing device is matching the hearing aid features to your specific hearing needs. Having an overview of your lifestyle will help the hearing professional to determine your hearing needs.

To help your hearing specialist identify the ideal hearing solution for you, I highly recommend writing down the four or five most important situations where you find hearing to be most difficult, frustrating, isolating, embarrassing, or limiting.

Bring this list to your appointment to help your specialist get a good understanding of your situation.

The specialist should review this list with you and ask you some more in-depth questions in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of your lifestyle, such as:

- what you spend your time doing?
- who you talk to (is it mostly to people one-on-one, in small groups, in large venues)?
- what situations are most challenging?
- how important it is that you hear in certain situations? and,
- how often do you find yourself in these situations?

The case history questions you will be asked regarding your lifestyle can be some of the most valuable time spent during the initial assessment appointment.

If the hearing specialist doesn’t understand your hearing situation well enough, then they won’t have all the information required to recommend the best device to meet your needs.
Choosing A Hearing Care Professional

or
Finding Someone Who Can Truly Help You Rather Than Themselves
Choosing A Hearing Care Professional

Choosing A Hearing Care Professional

When you are getting your hearing tested you should be dealing with one of two hearing professionals - audiologists or audiometrists. **Audiologists are university graduates with postgraduate qualifications in Audiology** (usually a Masters degree) or equivalent training.

A minimum of twelve months of supervised clinical practice in Audiology is also required.

Audiologists have broad responsibilities and expertise in all non-medical areas of hearing services, including complex hearing assessment and rehabilitation of hearing impairment as well as hearing instrument prescription, fitting and management.

**Audiometrists** are required to have completed a **minimum Diploma in Audiology** (TAFE) and have received in-house training from the hearing aid industry. They are required to have a minimum of three years of on-the-job experience in hearing assessment, hearing instrument prescription and fitting, and management of hearing problems.

Of the two hearing aid professionals in Australia, the audiologist is the more qualified of the two. However, this does not mean all audiologists are always better than all audiometrists.

**WHEN CONTACTING A HEARING CLINIC, FEEL FREE TO ASK HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE THE SPECIALIST HAS.**

To find the best hearing care professional for you, there are a few factors you need to consider. This is especially important if you are considering getting hearing aids. Hearing aids aren’t a ‘one off, set-and-forget purchase’ like some believe them to be.

A hearing aid is simply **one step in a life-long hearing rehabilitation process.** This means you will be spending a lot of time over several years with your hearing care professional. If you choose incorrectly, then those could be extremely frustrating years.

Much of what I discuss in this chapter also relates to audiometrists, so do not dismiss a clinician simply because they are not an audiologist. To understand what to look for in an audiologist, you first need to understand what an audiologist really is.

**What is an audiologist?**

An audiologist can be described as a hearing specialist. Unlike an ear specialist (ENT surgeon), an audiologist is not normally medically trained, but is instead classified as an allied health professional.

Audiologists in Australia have at least a Master’s degree in Audiology or if they trained overseas like I did, they need to write and pass a comprehensive equivalency examination in order to register with a recognised professional body, such as Audiology Australia.

This registration allows them to register to provide services under the Federal Government’s Office of Hearing Services’ Hearing Services Program if they choose.

Commonly, provisional audiologists are free to work unsupervised as soon as three months...
post-graduation. Although training from Australian universities is excellent, there is no substitute for hours on the job. A minimum of one year unsupervised experience is ideal.

**Warning!**

A PERSON DOES NOT ACTUALLY NEED TO BE ACCREDITED TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO SELF-FUNDED CLIENTS AS THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT REGULATION. SO FEEL FREE TO ASK THE PRACTITIONER OR THE CLINIC FOR THEIR PROVIDER NUMBER OR PROFESSIONAL BODY REGISTRATION NUMBER FOR PROOF OF REGISTRATION.

**Audiologists are not just trained in hearing aids.**

Their scope of practice is very wide and covers a range of skills including diagnostic hearing assessments, tinnitus management, balance assessments, newborn hearing screening and assessments, middle ear assessments, intra-operative hearing monitoring, hyperacusis specialist, cerumen removal, hearing loss prevention, hearing aid wholesale, cochlear implant assessments and mapping, clinical research, electrophysiological hearing assessments, hearing aid fittings, hearing rehabilitation, hearing therapy, paediatric hearing care and more.

As you can see, an audiologist has very wide range of knowledge and opportunities for clinical practice. The problem is that it is highly unlikely that they can be a master of all these areas of practice.

Some clinical settings do require the clinician to be a jack-of-all-trades, but what you should really be looking for is a specialist in the area of importance to you.

Even then there are factors that would make one audiologist more suitable to your needs than another.

**Things to consider in an audiologist to help you with your hearing loss and hearing aids**

The way the audiologist practices, as well as their specialisation, are critically important factors to consider when choosing an audiologist to work with, which is likely to be a period that could potentially span over several years.

You have to consider this selection process almost like an interview process.

I’ll try and keep it as simple as possible.

**Where they work has a big impact**

Audiologists can be found in a number of settings. These include working in hospitals, government organisations, hearing aid retail chains, big box stores, ear nose and throat specialist offices, medical clinics, schools and in private practice to name a few.

Where they work dictates their speciality in many cases. They are also likely to be limited by the procedures and appointment times of the specific setting. Some settings even limit the kinds of products they can recommend.

If you are looking for an audiologist to help you with hearing aids, there are a few common places you might find yourself looking, which I’ll discuss in the next chapter.

I have personally worked in a few of these before going out on my own in 2009, so I do speak from personal experience.

We also have audiologists who have worked in these models previously and they had much to share about their experiences.
The intention is not to write any workplace off, as there are always diamonds in the rough irrespective of where they work. Some of our best audiologists came from some of the least likely previous employers.

Consider the following regarding the practice you attend:

- Are they manufacturer owned?
- Is their focus on price or service?
- Are they jacks of all trades or do they specialise in the area you need them for?
- How many hearing aid brand choices does the workplace provide the clinician?
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Where To Find A Good Hearing Care Professional
Where To Find
A Good Hearing Care Professional

Before we begin - why it is important to select a clinic carefully?

It is important to select the right hearing clinic as hearing aids are not a one-off purchase. Hearing aids last around five years, but they require regular maintenance and tuning to keep up with your ever-changing hearing levels and lifestyle needs.

So you need to find a provider with whom you can build a long-term relationship.

Providers can have several clinicians working with them, but the clinic and their protocols are arguably more important than the specific clinician working for them at a specific time.

Check to see if the clinic has a documented client journey that they follow to ensure you will get the best long term care.

Before we begin - look for value, not just at the price

Most areas usually have some type of hearing service available. These may take the form of a full-time permanent hearing clinic, or a visiting site where the hearing specialist visits on certain days.

Visiting sites may only have a hearing specialist there as little as one day a month, and there may be minimal onsite support for minor repairs, etc.

In some instances, it may be beneficial to travel to a major metropolitan area to get more competitive pricing on hearing devices, as rural clinics tend to have less competition and may charge accordingly.

You can then use the savings generated from buying your hearing aids from them towards visits at your local clinic for adjustments should you require ongoing support. Often, you can still end up well ahead financially by doing this, rather than paying high local prices.

Also, there is also a movement towards remote support, where the clinician can adjust your hearing aids remotely through the internet. Just make sure to get the hearing aids set up in a face to face visit as a good foundation is critical to your ongoing success.

Remember that reasonable pricing is only one part of the value equation.

Before we begin - are you getting the best possible range?

Some hearing clinics offer a limited range of hearing aid manufacturers, and therefore don't offer their hearing care professionals, or their clients, true choice in getting the perfect hearing devices for their needs.

Your hearing aids ought to last you about five years, so make sure you at least have a chance of being offered the very best option for your needs.

Where possible, choose an independent provider who offers many brands. There are many excellent hearing aid manufacturers in the Australian market, each with their own philosophies and unique technologies.

Further in this book, I’ll provide an overview of all the major brands in Australia, but you can read more about the strengths of each brand on our website.
Hearing Aid Buyers Guide for the Self-Funded Australian
Christo Fourie

**Buyer’s Tip**

ASK HOW MANY HEARING AID MANUFACTURERS THE HEARING CLINIC HAS ACCESS TO, AND LOOK FOR CLINICS THAT HAVE AT LEAST FOUR DIFFERENT MANUFACTURERS AVAILABLE. THIS MEANS YOU CAN MAKE THE BEST CHOICE THAT MEETS YOUR HEARING NEEDS AND BUDGET. PHONAK, OTICON, SIGNIA AND RE Sound ARE BRANDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE ON THEIR LIST. WITH A CHOICE OF THESE FOUR BRANDS, YOU CAN FIT PRETTY MUCH ANY HEARING LOSS AND COMBINATION OF NEEDS VERY WELL.

Where to look for a hearing care professional?

There are many different business models in the industry:

- Large Retail Chains - often owned by a hearing aid manufacturer.

**Buyer’s Tip**

ASK WHETHER THE COMPANY YOU ARE DEALING WITH IS AUSTRALIAN OWNED. SOME OF THE VERY LARGE HEARING DEVICE RETAILERS OPERATING IN AUSTRALIA ARE FOREIGN-OWNED, WHICH MEANS ALL THEIR PROFITS GO ELSEWHERE, LEAVING VERY LITTLE FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY.

- Government Run hearing clinics - owned and operated by the Federal Government. Typically focussed on serving pensioners and Community Services obligation patients.

- Non-Audiological retailers - warehouses and optical stores also selling hearing aids fall under this category.

- ENT linked hearing clinics - owned in full or part by ENT specialists who refer to these clinics.

- Lead Generation sites - who act like referral services.

**Buyer’s Tip**

IF THE COMPANY THAT SOLD YOU THE AID DOES NOT MATCH THE NAME ON THE OFFICE WHERE YOU RECEIVE THE HEARING AID, THEN YOU ARE DEALING WITH A PARTNER OR AFFILIATE.

- Retail location outlets - typically located in shopping centres and highly retail focussed.

Independent Audiologists

Independent audiologists represent the smallest part of the Australian hearing aid industry, but they are also, by far, the most diverse group.

You will likely find an audiologist in pretty much any of the areas of specialty in this group. This group of around 290 clinics is shrinking as more and more manufacturers buy up their market share.

Many of these audiologists tend to be jacks-of-all-trades, as can be seen from the list of services on their websites, if they even have one. They would, however, still have a preferred specialty.

Value Hearing falls under the independent banner, so I’ll try my utmost to be unbiased.

Independent audiologists are generally very passionate about what they do, as they often are also business owners. Even if the audiologist simply works for the independent business,
they are generally in much closer contact with the owner and their philosophies, than they would be in a larger organisation.

Importantly, independent audiology practices are owned by audiologists, not by lawyers, entrepreneurs, investors, accountants, ENT or other non-audiologist owners. As such, the focus tends to be much more on the client or patient, rather than on the bottom line.

Independent audiologists do not have any ties to specific manufacturers and can, as a general rule, freely prescribe the best hearing aid for your needs.

You are highly likely to find a good audiologist in this group, but you still need to take note of the specialty of the clinic by carefully considering their website. Some tend to focus more on children or diagnostics rather than hearing aids. The narrower their focus on the areas important to you, the better they are likely to deliver your best outcome.

So if hearing aids are your priority, make sure they have sufficient interest and experience in a wide range of models.

You can easily find an independent audiologist by looking at their representative organisation’s website.

Independent Audiologists Australia (www.independentaudiologists.net.au) lists all their members with their interests and clearly states what they stand for.

This is a great resource where you can find a good audiologist close to you.

One consideration when looking at an independent audiologist, is to find out how long they have been in business. Starting a business is hard work and most audiologists aren’t business people.

Look for a practice which has been in business for at least six years.
What to Ask When Making Your Appointment
What to ask when making your appointment

When making the initial appointment, it is important to determine what type of hearing testing will occur and who will be conducting the testing. Many clinics will do a simple hearing screening, also called a hearing check, which may be performed by unqualified support staff or even using a computerised self-check kiosk.

Depending on whether or not they have deemed you to have passed or failed this screening, they will use high pressure selling to book you a complete assessment with their hearing specialist to purchase hearing aids.

A hearing check is not a bad concept on its own however. If you are unsure as to whether you have any hearing difficulties, a hearing check can let you know the basic status of your hearing, and whether it is worthwhile spending the time and money on a more comprehensive assessment.

It is important to check that the person performing this test is a qualified professional.

However, if you have clear concerns about your hearing, choose a clinic that will do a complete hearing assessment from the outset as it will certainly save you time.

These are relatively inexpensive (or free), and the small cost you pay for this assessment will ensure that the hearing specialist has a comprehensive understanding of your lifestyle, hearing needs and hearing difficulties from the beginning, enabling them to recommend the most suitable options for you.

Ensuring that you have an appointment for a full comprehensive hearing assessment the first time will save you extra appointments in the long-term.

AN EASY WAY TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU ARE LIKELY TO RECEIVE A SCREENING OR A FULL HEARING ASSESSMENT IS TO ASK HOW LONG THE APPOINTMENT WILL TAKE. A SCREENING APPOINTMENT IS USUALLY LESS THAN 30 MINUTES, WHILE A FULL ASSESSMENT APPOINTMENT CAN TAKE 1 TO 1½ HOURS.

A comprehensive hearing assessment appointment takes between 1 to 1½ hours to complete. This allows enough time for the testing to be done, as well as for you to review your hearing needs and options with your hearing specialist. This will save you time in the long by preventing you from having to return for another appointment.
9

What Makes A Good Hearing Care Professional For YOU
What Makes A Good Hearing Care Professional For YOU

Do your homework on the clinic before you make an appointment

You might like to ask the clinic how long the company has been in business, as there are many newcomers promising the world without having any proven sustainability to support you and your investment going into the future.

A company that has been in existence at least seven years is ideal as they are past the difficult start-up years and are starting to see repeat business come their way. The benefit to you is that you are more likely to enjoy continued support if they stick around.

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Once you have shortlisted clinics you may want to work with, then your homework begins.

Whilst considering an audiologist, you can do a bit of research on them and the company they work for/in before making first contact.

The best places to do this is to look at their website or search their name on Google to see their Facebook or LinkedIn profiles. Also see if they have published anything on YouTube.

Look at the company website

Looking at a company’s website content can give you some unique insights into their focus and specialities.

A website listing hearing aid models and pricing, may be more focussed on the hearing aid sale than on your best outcomes.

Look for a provider who is focussed on you. Does their website speak about you and your needs or about the company and their achievements? Do they use the words “we” and “our” more than they use the words “you” and “your”?

Are they focussed on educating you, or are they simply a ‘brochure’ website, with little to show you how they are uniquely interested in you?

Worse still, are they trying to just sell you some hearing aids at the cheapest pricing possible, without much regard for the longer term care necessary to guarantee long term outcomes?

A clinician working in a company not focussed on you might be limited in what they can offer you in relation to long term care, no matter how good they are. They might not stick around long either if the company’s values are in contrast to their own.

SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ANY INFORMATION ON HOW THE AUDIOLOGISTS WORKING IN THE COMPANY ARE TRAINED IN THE COMPANY’S PHILOSOPHIES. IT IS ALL GOOD AND WELL HAVING WONDERFUL CONTENT, BUT IF THERE ARE NO PROCESSES IN PLACE TO ENSURE ALL THE AUDIOLOGISTS WORKING IN THE COMPANY FOLLOW THE SAME LINE OF THINKING, THEN THE RESULTS COULD BE LACKING.
Check out the Reviews

Review the testimonials to ensure that you are dealing with a clinic that is dedicated to excellent client outcomes.

Also check Google and Facebook for reviews as website testimonials, even though worthwhile reading, tend to only show positive experiences.

Make sure the reviews are a mixture of new clients (first time users), long term clients (have worn hearing aids for a few years) and existing users (have used hearing aids for a while and came from another provider).

Look for independent reviews on the company you are interested on their Google Maps listing (search their name and location on Google and a map listing will show up with all their reviews).

The retailer has no control over these reviews and cannot delete those they don’t like. As such, these reviews give you a clearer picture of what is actually happening with customers in the clinic and how the business responds to customer complaints.

MAKE SURE THERE IS A MIX OF NEW CLIENTS AND CLIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN DOING BUSINESS WITH THE COMPANY FOR A FEW YEARS REPRESENTED IN THE REVIEWS. IT IS EASIER TO KEEP A NEW CLIENT HAPPY, THAN TO KEEP CLIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN WITH THE COMPANY FOR YEARS HAPPY. LOOK FOR AUDIOLOGISTS NAMES THAT KEEP COMING UP IN THESE REVIEWS.

Once you have found the clinics with the best reviews, that resonate with your needs, then it is time to make first contact.

Are they responsive?

When you first contact a clinic where your candidate audiologist works, take special note of how quickly you are responded to.

How did the first communication make you feel?

Even if it is not the audiologist you speak to, or email with, in this first interaction, the way you are treated at the first contact is very telling of what you might expect going forward.

The person first responding to you is the public face of the business and things don't generally get better after the first contact.

Speed of response is important. Certainly, you wouldn't expect a quick response outside of business hours or over weekend. It is, however, fair to expect that any contact requests via webforms, emails or voice messages are responded to in less than an hour.

If you are happy with what you read by email or hear on the phone, it is time to go an see the audiologist.

Typically, you would start with a hearing test or a hearing aid discussion appointment. These may be free, as in the case of Value Hearing, or there may be a charge associated.

Pay attention to the communication leading up to the first appointment. Are you reminded of appointments? How is the intake process?

Those who pay more attention to these details, may be more focussed on your experience as a whole.
Their bedside manner

Audiologists in Australia were traditionally trained scientifically. This means that their focus has been on science, rather than on client care. Over the last few years client-centred care has come more into focus.

With client-centred care, you are the focus and the audiologist is encouraged to build rapport with you, getting to know you and your lifestyle, and emotional needs better. In this way they can give you more effective recommendations and better guide you to the outcomes you seek.

The scientific approach is more inline with the old-school medical model. In this model, you are simply a patient to be worked on rather than worked with. Little care is given to your experience, and you are told what to do, rather than guided to the best solution.

You can might be able to pick the difference by seeing if you are referred to as a patient (medical model) or client.

The way the reception and/or audiologist greets you can also be revealing. Being acknowledged when you enter the clinic and greeted warmly is more in line with a client-centred approach.

Making you wait excessively without apologising for making you wait is more consistent with a traditional medical approach.

As hearing loss, and the journey to better hearing, is very much an emotional journey, the client centred approach is the one we feel serves our clients better.

If you are more a traditionalist and are happy to be told what to do and when, with little support, then you might prefer the medical model.

How informed did you feel during the consultation?

Is the audiologist interested in your needs?

One way is to see if they ever ask you what you'd like to achieve in the initial appointment.

Do you feel listened to?

A good audiologist will give you opportunities to ask questions and will give appropriate and clear answers, taking your needs, as mentioned, during the consultation into account.

You should never feel ignored or patronised.
How did you feel after the initial consultation?

Did you feel well informed and satisfied? Or did you feel underwhelmed with many questions unanswered or perhaps just overwhelmed?

Did you feel pushed into a decision?

You should feel empowered to make the right decision for you, with the confidence that the audiologist can back up their confident recommendation with great outcomes.

Are they free to make choices that are best for you?

Take care when you speak to an audiologist working in some of the larger retail chains. Ask them what brands they mainly work with.

Also feel free to ask what other models they might consider as alternatives and why the model they recommended was they one they did.

Did they ask about any special needs you may have?

If you have any needs you consider to be special, ask the audiologist about their experience and expertise in this area.

Some audiologists may specialise in certain conditions like profound hearing loss, Meniere's disease or severe tinnitus. If you have any of these conditions, you are better served by an audiologist with plenty of experience in this field.
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What to Expect from a Hearing Assessment
What to Expect from a Hearing Assessment

Your first appointment with your hearing specialist may be a hearing assessment to determine the extent of your hearing problems and ascertain the most suitable treatment option for you.

You will be asked a series of questions about your hearing difficulties and where specifically you have problems (in groups, out in social gatherings, with the TV or phone for example).

*Be sure to bring the list you prepared from the Preparing To Buy Hearing Aids chapter to assist you and your specialist.*

The hearing specialist should also want to determine a possible cause of hearing problem, so you will be asked questions to help them pinpoint why it has occurred.

Don't be disappointed if the cause of the hearing loss cannot be determined, as this is not always possible.

Before the assessment commences, the hearing specialist should have a look in your ears using an **otoscope**. This will reveal any built-up wax, ear infections or middle ear issues that may affect your hearing or help explain the test results.

Some better-equipped clinics use a **video otoscope** that allows you to see what the hearing specialist sees on a television monitor. It is a unique and highly empowering experience being able to see inside your own ears. You are then able to confirm and better understand what is noted and discussed. I highly recommend it.

You should then undergo a pain-free hearing assessment, which takes about 20 to 30 minutes.

You will be asked to respond to sounds heard through two different types of headphones, so the specialist can determine the softest sounds you can hear (your hearing thresholds) over a wide frequency range.

Your speech discrimination should also be assessed.

During this testing you will be asked to repeat single words heard through the headphones, to determine your ability to understand speech in quiet. This test helps the specialist to confirm whether amplification via hearing instruments can benefit you.

Ideally, a hearing assessment should also include a speech-in-noise test, which gives insight into your ability to hear and understand speech in a noisy environment (with background speech babble).

Good word recognition in quiet doesn't automatically mean good word recognition in noise. Therefore, speech tests in noise give more insight into what hearing solution will be the most suitable for you to assist you not only in quiet environments, but also in the presence of background noise.
Finally, you may have a pressure test done to see if your middle ear system is functionally normally, which is an automatic test that only takes a few seconds.

Once the specialist has all the information, they will explain the results to you, and depending on the results and what you have told them about your perceived difficulties, they will discuss your rehabilitation options with you.

Rehabilitation options can range from a variety of solutions such as:

- Doing nothing at all
- Monitoring your hearing in the future
- Being referred to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist, or, if appropriate,
- Recommending hearing devices and associated accessories.
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What Information Should You Expect?
What Information Should You Expect?

When discussing your results and recommendations, you should expect to be taken through the assessment procedures, told why specific tests were used, as well as what the results were for each test.

You should also expect some education on how we normally hear and how your hearing is different from normal. This will help you to understand what the best course of action is for your particular case.

**Buyer’s Tip**

IF HEARING DEVICES ARE AN OPTION FOR YOU, YOU SHOULD BE GIVEN CLEAR, EASY TO UNDERSTAND INFORMATION ON WHAT HEARING AIDS ARE BEST FOR YOU AND WHY.

UNDERSTANDING HOW A PARTICULAR HEARING DEVICE SUITS YOUR NEEDS WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU TO DECIDE ON WHICH ONE TO PROCEED WITH.

For many people there are usually two or three devices from different hearing instrument manufacturers which will be ideal.

- Your clinician may recommend one model above others based on your results.
- It should be made clear to you why this particular model was chosen.
- If you aren’t sure why a particular model was recommended, **ask!**

Ideally, you should be given the opportunity to see, feel and hear through the recommended solution. Sometimes this is not always possible, particularly if a custom made solution is indicated.

**It is important that you like the way your hearing provider works with you.**

This is a person you need to trust to guide you through your journey to better hearing and that is not possible without trust.

Your provider also needs to take the time to empower you after carefully listening to your needs.

Empowerment should consist of ensuring that you understand your hearing in a way that makes sense to you. You also need to feel confident in them and their recommendations.

**Buyer’s Tip**

IF THE INFORMATION SEEMS LACKING OR DOES NOT HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR HEARING PROBLEM OR YOUR AVAILABLE OPTIONS, INSIST ON FURTHER EXPLANATION TO CLARIFY ANY MISUNDERSTANDING.

IT IS YOUR HEARING AFTER ALL. YOU CAN MORE SUCCESSFULLY AND SATISFACTORY IMPROVE YOUR HEARING AND YOUR LIFE BY BEING EMPOWERED AND INFORMED.
Types of Hearing Aids
& How They Work
Types of Hearing Aids & How They Work

There are four main components common to all hearing aids currently available on the market. They are:

1. A microphone which picks up the sounds from your environment and then converts them into electrical impulses. These electrical impulses—or signals—are then sent to the amplifier.
2. The amplifier boosts the volume of these electrical signals, making it easier to hear. The amplified signals are then sent to the receiver and speaker.
3. The receiver or speaker inside of hearing aids converts the amplified electrical signals back into sounds and then sends them directly to the ear where the natural hearing process takes over and the brain receives the impulses.
4. To keep this process working, a battery is needed inside of the hearing aids.

So essentially, a hearing aid is simply a tiny computer dedicated to boosting sounds selectively to compensate for the damage in your ear..

Let’s take a closer look at the four components to better understand which types of hearing aids make the best hearing aids.

**How do Hearing Aids Work — The Microphone**

Sound waves are actually waves of energy which are travelling through the air.

Just as the waves you make in a pool diminish in power the further away they get from the source, the further away from the source (e.g. a mouth, a radio, a television) sound waves get, the weaker they get.

In order to make these vibrations louder again, a microphone must pick them up and convert them from the sound waves into electrical impulses or signals.

In the best hearing aids, the microphone is ultra-tiny and has a wide range of pickup to deliver the least distorted signal into the rest of the hearing aid.

**How do Hearing Aids Work — Electronic Amplifier**

Since the purpose of hearing aids is the amplification of sound, there must be an amplification device inside the unit.

Amplifiers don’t actually turn up the sound per se, what they do is increase the strength of the electrical signal.

The key here is boosting the strength enough so that it will eventually become more audible when it is turned back into sound, but not so much that distortion occurs.

If the signal is boosted too much, the distortion will produce sounds that are unrecognisable to our ears when compared to the source. The best hearing aids have digital amplifiers that don’t require too much power and can process a wide range of sounds without distortion.

Modern hearing aid amplifiers can also selectively change the sound based on the level of background noise, giving you more clarity, automatically.
How do Hearing Aids Work — The Receiver / Speaker

No, these aren't two different parts—the receiver is the industry term for a speaker.

The function of the speaker is simple, but crucial: convert the strengthened electrical signal back into sound. It must do this without distorting the sound or weakening the strength of the signal, otherwise, all of the work done by the hearing aid thus far will be lost.

Sound quality is generally better the closer the speaker is to the ear canal.

How do Hearing Aids Work — The Power Supply

The most important part of the hearing aid is the battery because without it, nothing would work.

Batteries are the preferred source of power for hearing aids because they are inexpensive and can be changed or recharged fairly easily.

One of the most critical things to look for in a good battery is the constant delivery of a consistent voltage, from full charge to no charge—you don’t want spikes and dips in your energy source. Cheap hearing aid batteries can cause many issues, so make sure you only use quality hearing aid batteries.

These days there are also several rechargeable hearing aid options available to choose from. More information on Rechargeable Hearing Aids can be found in our free booklet. The link is in the back of this book.

Other Considerations - ‘Must have’ features

Modern hearing aids come with a range of features, which all look like ‘must haves’ to the layman.

Ironically, the easiest feature to add to a hearing aid is more channels. Many less capable hearing aids advertise that they have many channels. This may appear impressive, but more than eight channels adds very little additional benefit.

The key features any decent hearing aid should have are:

- Great sound quality - for undistorted, clear listening
- Good Directionality - for optimal hearing improvement in background noise
- Automaticity to allow for effortless use without constant fiddling

Read our frequently updated article on ‘must have’ hearing aid features to gain a deeper understanding of these features.

Types of Hearing Aids

There are various different styles and types of hearing aids to suit different levels of hearing loss, with different capabilities and features.

Here I give an introductory overview of each type. To find out more, head to the Value Hearing website for more information on each, including:

- Advantages and disadvantages
- How they work, and
- Who they are best suited to.

Behind The Ear Hearing Aids

The most common hearing aid type is the Behind The Ear hearing aid, recognisable from their compact case which sits right behind the ear. Durable, easy to clean and maintain, and ease of use are just some of the advantages of the BTE hearing aid.
Completely In The Canal Hearing Aids
Virtually invisible and one of the more aesthetically pleasing hearing aid type, CIC hearing aids are most suitable for those with mild to moderate hearing loss. They're custom made for the wearer with a high quality and natural sound.

In The Canal Hearing Aids
Incredibly popular with wearers of ITC aids, these discreet hearing aids are custom fit to your canal, providing excellent sound quality and greater manual control. They're also easy to insert and remove, and work remarkably in noisy environments.

Invisible In The Canal Hearing Aids
IIC hearing aids are the smallest type of aids available on the market. Producing a clear and vibrant sound with minimal sound distortion due to its location close to the eardrum. Suitable for mild to moderate hearing loss.

In The Ear Hearing Aids
Suitable for those with mild, moderate or severe hearing loss, In The Ear hearing aids are easy to insert. While they are visible, they provide excellent noise reduction and easy access to controls.

Receiver In Ear / Canal Hearing Aids
Combining the best features of the ITC and BTE hearing aids, Receiver In The Ear hearing aids are small and visually discreet, while offering flexibility, high sound quality and power. Suitable for all levels of hearing loss, these hearing aids are a popular choice due to the sound quality and minimal visibility. Small enough to be discreet and large enough to house advanced technologies such as directional microphones and bluetooth.

Half Shell Hearing Aids
Half Shell In The Ear hearing aids are powerful yet cosmetically appealing devices that occupy that lower portion of the outer ear. Whilst not as discrete as other options, their size enables the addition of many wonderful features like volume controls, directional microphones and special settings for various listening environments.

Full Shell Hearing Aids
Full Shell In the Ear hearing aids are ideal for wearers who experience mild to severe hearing loss. These aids are a great option for wearers who want substance over style as the increased size of the device allows for the addition of many features and settings.

Rechargeable Hearing Aids
There's a new generation of rechargeable hearing aids that are all about convenience, simplicity of use and improved technology. Now lasting longer between charges and more features, rechargeable hearing aids will change your day-to-day life.

Bluetooth Hearing Aids
Bluetooth is an exciting new innovation in hearing aids and the technology behind it is improving all the time. People love the convenience of music or podcast streaming as well as the ability to take phone calls hands-free but there are some things you need to be aware of.

We have a comprehensive booklet on Bluetooth Hearing Aids on our website. The link is in the back of this book.
Overview of Hearing Aid Brands in Australia
Overview of Hearing Aid Brands in Australia

As an independent audiologist, I’m free to recommend any of the high quality hearing aid brands on the market. My sole focus is to give you the best recommendation possible based on your unique needs.

While all the manufacturers are very good, there are going to be brands and models which will better suit your hearing needs better than others.

With the investment you’re making in hearing aids, it is important to know what the major brands are so you can make effective comparisons.

These brands are also innovating all the time, so rather than put all the information in this book, I thought we’d start with an overview and some of my observations. Visit the Value Hearing website where different hearing aid models and information is updated as soon as it is released.

These brands are presented in no particular order.

Phonak

Phonak is a premium Swiss hearing aid company owned by Sonova. Phonak is one of the largest hearing aid manufacturers in the world and has always been at the leading edge of technology especially when it comes to improving a person’s ability to hear speech in noise. Their latest chipset, called the Marvel platform, is one of the world’s most powerful hearing aid platforms. It delivers exceptional performance in noise and has second-to-none sound quality resulting in fantastic music reproduction. It is also the first truly Bluetooth hearing aid platform compatible with any Bluetooth mobile phone.

Oticon

Oticon hearing aids is a subsidiary of Demant in Denmark and is undoubtedly one of the largest hearing aid manufacturers in the world, with their own chain of Audioclinic retail stores throughout Australia and the world. Oticon Hearing aids have won several design awards and are renowned for the comfortable sound quality, sleek appearance and durability. These hearing aids are liked by audiologists and audiometrists as they employ simplified fitting software, making successful hearing aid fittings almost foolproof.

Signia

Sivantos has bought Siemens hearing aids and are rebranding as Signia. With Signia, Sivantos starts a new chapter in forward-thinking hearing solutions with expertly engineered devices that are almost invisible, highly automated and adapt to the user’s preferences. Signia stands for hearing innovations that are centered on the patient’s needs and deliver the highest level of quality and satisfaction. The Signia product portfolio will provide a comprehensive range of advanced hearing solutions with life-changing technologies that welcome hearing aid wears to the colour of sound.

Widex

Widex is a Danish hearing aid manufacturer that has lead the field in excellent high fidelity sound quality. Their sound quality has become known as Widex sound and in the past clients who were fitted with Widex initially, always tended to stick with Widex.
This has changed somewhat in recent years, but is still partially true. Widex is one of the few privately owned hearing aid manufacturing companies in the world and even though they initially struggled to keep up with the regular update cycle of the larger manufacturers such as Phonak and Oticon, their latest chipset found in the Widex Evoke, which also allows rechargeability, Artificial Intelligence and direct to iPhone connectivity, can proudly stand next to the giants in the hearing aid industry. Widex and Sivantos has recently merged and are now known as WS Audiology.

**Unitron**

Unitron was originally a Canadian hearing instrument company, which was bought several years ago by Sonova, the same company that owns Phonak hearing aids. Their research and development is still based in Canada, but their production facility is on the same grounds as Phonak in Switzerland. Unitron has always been a leader in producing great value hearing aids. They generally seem to select the best technologies on the market and package them into a lower cost, well performing hearing aid. In the last few years they have innovated with their own such as SoundNav and SpeechFocus, which proven to significantly improve a hearing aid user’s hearing in noise. They share the same super-fast chipset with Phonak, so their hearing aids are truly high quality. They tend to only get the latest chipset six months after Phonak has it. So make sure they have had a recent update before considering.

**GN Resound**

GN ReSound is among the world’s largest manufacturers of hearing aids. Since the company was founded in 1943, ReSound has been known for great sound quality, design excellence and meaningful solutions that help hearing impaired people rediscover sounds. They were the first company to bring made for iPhone hearing aids to the market and have several years of experience in this niche. Their experience has lead to one of the most stable direct to iPhone hearing aids currently on the market. They are also the only brand to offer direct to iPhone connectivity in an in-the-canal hearing aid. They have been quickly climbing the ladder and are looking set to take their place in the top three hearing aid brands.

**Starkey**

Makes the smallest invisible hearing aids on the market. They have good programming flexibility for the clinician, so most can be fine tuned and have a great range of styles for all kinds of hearing loss. Starkey has rechargeable models and is generally considered reliable. They offer direct iPhone connection without intermediate device in Halo 2 Wireless CROS hearing aids. They are also innovating with integrating sensors into their hearing aids. The Livio AI integrates a fall sensor.

**Bernafon**

Bernafon is a Swiss Hearing Aid Company that is part of Demant which also owns Oticon and Sonic Innovations. Bernafon offers great technology, such as ChannelFree Processing, which delivers very natural sound quality. Bernafon’s Saphira and older Juna Hearing aids offer one of the best Feedback Management system currently in the market today.

Bernafon hearing aids are good value to clients, they offer exceptional design and sound quality. In Australia, they are not priced much lower than the premium brand range from Oticon. So Oticon may be a better option for some.
**Sonic Innovations**

Sonic Innovations is an American hearing aid company which was bought by Demant in November 2010. Demant also owns Oticon and Bernafon and, through the Sonic Innovations acquisition, obtained several hundred HearingLife clinics throughout the world. Sonic Innovation's technology development has always focused on producing the best electronic noise reduction algorithms, but due to the company's smaller size, they have not released dramatically new technology for a number of years. The recent acquisition has seen this change fairly quickly as they started sharing technology with Oticon's much larger research and development department and then combine the superior hardware with their market leading noise reduction algorithms. Due to the shared technology, Oticon's offerings may offer better value if not priced too differently.
What Should You Expect From The Hearing Specialist Recommendations?
What Should You Expect From The Hearing Specialist Recommendations?

Once your hearing specialist has completed the hearing assessment, they should make a recommendation based on your results. If hearing instruments are suitable for you, your hearing specialist should use the information from both your test results and your case history, to select a device which best matches:

- Your hearing levels
- Speech understanding in quiet
- Speech understanding in noise
- Lifestyle, and
- Hearing needs

The explanation needs to clearly demonstrate why a certain recommendation has been made.

**Buyer’s Tip**

**IF THE CLINICIAN SIMPLY GIVES YOU A LIST OF DEVICES AT DIFFERENT PRICE LEVELS AND EXPECTS YOU TO CHOOSE, YOU NEED TO QUESTION WHY THE CLINICIAN IS NOT MAKING A FIRM AND CONFIDENT RECOMMENDATION. THIS MAY BE A SIGN THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO MAKE A CLEAR SUGGESTION OR THEY ARE NOT CONFIDENT IN WHICH SOLUTION WILL BE BEST.**

Some important things to consider once you have been presented with your options are getting:

- A fair price
- Hearing aid recommendations
- Hearing aid quotes (be aware of the dirty tricks!)
- High quality aftercare

Let’s take a look at these four points in depth.

**Getting a fair price**

There is a very wide range of hearing aid prices in the Australian market. Differences of up to $5000 on exactly the same devices can be found by simply shopping around and making some simple enquiries to different hearing aid clinics.

**Buyer’s Tip**

**TO GET A QUICK QUOTE, OR TO SEE IF YOUR PROVIDER IS IN THE BALLPARK, SIMPLY REQUEST A QUOTE FROM US AND WE’LL PROMPTLY SEND YOU A FORMAL, PRINTABLE QUOTE BY EMAIL. YOU ARE THEN WELCOME TO USE THIS QUOTE TO KEEP YOUR CURRENT PROVIDER HONEST AS SOME DO PRICE MATCH. MAKE SURE THEY ALSO MATCH THE CONDITIONS AND INCLUSIONS STIPULATED IN THE QUOTE.**
A note about online bought hearing devices

There has recently been some interest in obtaining hearing aids online at discounted prices. This is usually a poor option, as the level of service involved with this method commonly leads to buyers with a less than ideal outcomes.

You also require regular visits, in person or remotely, to ensure the hearing aids keep up with your changing hearing, and also to address any performance issues in the aids before they become noticeable.

Hearing aids purchased online are often not set as well as those fitted in-person by the professional. Having your hearing properly addressed is critical to your health as the brain loses capacity to deal with sound over time if it is not stimulated properly. (See the section How Can You Tell If You Have Hearing Loss).

Additionally, purchasing hearing devices online can mean that you're not purchasing a genuine device, or that it comes with no guarantee, or limited warranty.

While it may seem like an attractive way of saving money initially, it can end up costing you more money long-term, as well as being a negative experience.

When Is A Hearing Aid, Not A Hearing Aid?

Not all hearing aids sold online are actually real hearing aids either.

Recent online entrants into Australia are offering pre-programmed hearing aids to “suit most people” for less than $600 each.

This is complete nonsense. Each person and hearing loss is unique, so even though this may improve your hearing somewhat, it is far from optimal, and may actually cause further noise induced hearing loss over time.

We have an article on these “fake hearing aids” on our website.

Not all hearing instruments are suitable for all hearing problems, and you need to have the correct style of device chosen.

If you want a discreet, in the ear device, these are made from a mould of your ear. This needs to be done by a hearing specialist.

Remember, the lowest price does not necessarily mean it is the best value.

For hearing aids to be set up correctly, you need to be face-to-face with the hearing specialist, as tests should be performed whilst the devices are in your ears.

Other points to consider is the amount of face-to-face after care service available for important fine-tuning after the initial fitting, as well as ongoing after care. You can read more about the risks of purchasing online on our website.

Hearing devices need to be adjusted as you acclimatise to the sound, or if your hearing changes, so establishing a relationship with a capable local hearing care professional is important.

Hearing aid recommendations

After reviewing and explaining the results from your assessment, your hearing specialist will discuss your hearing aid options with you, if appropriate.
Factors they should take into account will be:

- Your level of motivation
- Your expectations
- Your needs
- Your preference for automatic vs manual hearing aids
- Hearing assessment results
- Speech in noise results, and
- Your lifestyle and budget.

Your specialist may discuss one or two different models, but should be able to suggest the option, based on your results discussed with you, they feel will most likely to work best for you.

Don't accept that it will always be the most expensive hearing aid.

Level of technology should be closely linked to your test performance in noise and in quiet, NOT ONLY to your lifestyle or budget.

YOUR HEARING SPECIALIST SHOULD EXPLAIN TO YOU EXACTLY WHY THEY FEEL THE HEARING DEVICE OPTIONS PRESENTED ARE THE BEST FOR YOU. IF YOUR SPECIALIST DOESN'T EXPLAIN TO YOU WHY THEY FEEL THE RECOMMENDATION IS THE BEST OPTION FOR YOUR NEEDS, FEEL FREE TO ASK THEM FOR AN EXPLANATION TO ENSURE YOU ARE GETTING WHAT YOU NEED.

Ask them what other comparable products are available from different hearing aid manufacturers.

Ask them what happens if the first recommendation does not work out. If your specialist can't offer a range of solutions, it may be that they are limited in the manufacturers that they offer, which in turn limits your choice.

Never accept a recommendation made simply based on price! The hearing specialist should be able to clarify why a specific model has been suggested rather than offering you a menu of hearing aids at different price points and expecting you to choose which will be best.

Is the quote professional? Does it clearly show the hearing aid model, price, as well as included services and warranties? Don't accept a price simply scribbled on a brochure when it comes to such an important purchase.

If you are ever pressured to make an immediate decision that makes you feel uncomfortable, then simply walk away.

You can do much better than that.

Hearing Aid Quotations – The Dirty Tricks Used to Confuse You

WHEN GIVEN YOUR HEARING DEVICE QUOTE, REQUEST THAT IT HAS THE HEARING AID MANUFACTURER’S NAME AND THE HEARING AID MODEL ON IT. YOU WILL NEED THIS INFORMATION IF YOU WANT TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE GETTING REASONABLE A PRICE.
Unfortunately, some companies are more concerned about their bottom line than your hearing.

There are a few methods some companies will use to discourage you from comparing their prices:

i. **Not providing you with the hearing aid model details on your quote.** Instead, hearing devices might be classified as “Silver Level”, “Gold Level”, “Platinum Level” or “Diamond Level,” which is just a grouping they have given devices in similar price ranges.

   This makes it harder for you to know what they are actually purchasing, and makes it almost impossible for you to check their specific pricing against competitors. It can be an indication that they may be over-charging for their hearing aids.

   **WE CAN EASILY HELP YOU DECIPHER THIS. SIMPLY REQUEST A QUOTE FROM US, LETTING US KNOW WHO QUOTED YOU AND ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU HAVE. WE WILL THEN PROVIDE YOU WITH THE MODEL AND A COMPARATIVE QUOTE.**

ii. **Some companies like to take a non-refundable deposit on the hearing aids before they are ordered.** This is to discourage people looking around for more competitive prices. If this is insisted upon, you should have a written assurance that you will get a full refund if you change your mind before the fitting.

iii. Make sure that the company has the longevity to back up their aftercare service. Those offering extended aftercare, extended warranties (all hearing devices in Australia come with a three year manufacturer's warranty) as well as all the other long term add-ons to sweeten the deal, have to at least been in business for as long as the duration of the promised inclusions.

   All the added extras might seem enticing, but it’s important to make sure that the company has the longevity to continue providing these services to you. If not, then these value add may not be worth the paper they are written on.

   A few new and desperate clinics are promising the world, but have not been proven to be sustainable for the period they promise you free services for. An example of this is offering 4 (four) years of included aftercare while they have been in business for less than 2 (two) years! Statistics suggest that 85% of small businesses fail in their first year, while 70% fail in their second year. You don’t want to be left out in the cold by promises they can’t deliver on.

iv. On the flip side, some of the larger chains have been known to use scare tactics to explain their higher prices when confronted with lower quotes for the same products from smaller competitors. They may say that the clinic in question won’t be around next year, or say things such as they don’t offer genuine products sourced from Australia. This is simply to protect their own interests and higher than normal prices.

   You can always call the hearing aid manufacturer in Australia and ask them if the clinic you are interested in buying your hearing aids from cheaper is an official supplier of their range.

v. Selling out of date models cheaply. Some retailers have a range of hearing aids they can sell cheaply as they are previous generation technology. These models do not perform as well as current generation models and will be unrepairable as soon as manufacturers runs out of parts. Large manufacturer chains and big box stores are most commonly guilty of this practice.
Once again, you are welcome to contact us for a quote to see if the model recommended is an out-of-date model.

**Aftercare services**

It is important to know what services, consumables and warranties are offered with your hearing devices if you are trying to compare prices between companies. More importantly, is the clinic providing aftercare haphazardly, where you have to let them know if you have issues? Or do they have a clearly defined client journey?

You can read about a well-defined client journey on our website. You will find a link at the end of this book.

The biggest issue with a client-led aftercare process is that many people do not notice as their hearing aid slowly deteriorates in performance. This could result with your expensive hearing aid ending up in a drawer as it isn’t working, rather than in your ear. At best, it can lead to a using suboptimal functioning hearing aid for for longer than you need to.

Remember, hearing aids work on the brain rather than fixing the ear. Your brain adjusts to what you give it and may lose connection if you aren’t properly stimulated.

Consistent aftercare with active recalls is ALL about getting the best possible outcome for you over the long term. Unlimited visits without active recalls means very little, as the clinic is hoping you will be like most consumers, and not complain until things have been really bad for a long time or, worse still, simply give up on your hearing aids and not bother calling them.

Appointment time with a clinician is expensive, so active recalls have more value than leaving it up to you to decide when you might need help.

☐ **Buyer’s Tip**

*SIX-MONTHLY HEARING INSTRUMENT CHECKS ARE RECOMMENDED AS HEARING DEVICES TEND TO DRIFT SIGNIFICANTLY IN PERFORMANCE WITHOUT REGULAR SERVICING.*

Check if the clinic you are considering has any proactive programs in place to ensure your ongoing satisfaction with your hearing devices.

A six monthly hearing instrument check with the clinician is a good idea at the very least, and your devices can be adjusted at this time if there is any change to the performance or your hearing.

Some clinics offer six monthly over the counter servicing, which is not as beneficial or valuable as six monthly clinical consultations where the hearing aid performance is actually measured.

**Ensure you get the full warranty for your hearing devices or look around for a better deal.**

The standard set by hearing aid manufacturers is typically three years.

This may not always be passed on to you or it may have negotiated down when deals are being brokered between hearing aid clinics and hearing aid manufacturers.

Some companies also offer a quantity of batteries, consumables or hearing device drying kits.

Take all of this into consideration when deciding how client-focused the hearing aid clinic is and when comparing prices.

One year warranty = around $150 per aid in value.
Another great aftercare service is the availability of loan hearing aids if your hearing aids ever go back to the manufacturer for service.

Check to see if your chosen provider offers this valuable service, so that you aren’t left without your ears for weeks at a time, when they require repair.

Make sure that whatever is promised is written down in an agreement and make sure you have a copy.

This means you have proof of what was promised if any issues present in the future.

**Return or exchange periods**

Most companies will offer a return period on any device you purchase to give you peace of mind that the hearing aids you have purchased are going to do the job for you.

This is usually a 30 day period where you can return your purchased hearing aids or try another model device if you feel your initial choice is not meeting your hearing needs. A longer return or exchange period is generally better as it allows you more time to fully adjust to the hearing aid.

**A longer full money back guarantee is a better option than a short term partial money back guarantee.**

Ask your hearing specialist what their return policy is.

*This should also be written on your quote or hearing aid purchase receipt.*

*Make sure you are aware of any fees involved in exchanges or returns as these can be substantial.*

**Trials vs Money back**

You’re likely familiar with the ads you’ve seen in newspapers, magazines, radio and perhaps even as a flyer shoved in your letter box:

*Free Hearing Aid Trials! We need 25 people to trial the latest hearing aid technology! Blah! Blah! Blah!*

Free hearing aid trials are used prolifically in the hearing aid industry to attract new clients. The reason they are used so much is that they work extremely well for the clinics involved in them.
They work for a few reasons:

1. Clients believe they are a good way to test drive a hearing aid and are happy to receive a free sample.
2. Once clients receive something for free, they feel they owe the giving clinic something in return. This is called reciprocity and is often used in sales and marketing to influence clients.
3. Clients believe the outcome they receive in the trial will be the same outcome they receive in real life – which is not completely true in many cases.

**Okay, so where is the problem with free trials?**

All in all, free hearing aid trials seem like a really good idea that appears to serve both client and clinic well. So why would this be a problem?

There are quite a few potential problems with free trials if you dig a little deeper:

- Free trials are often offered for only a week or two. However, it takes your brain way more than that to adjust sufficiently for you to experience the final benefit. So you are basically making a decision based on the honeymoon period, which does not always relate to the long term outcome.
- Hearing aids used in free trials are, more often than not, the most expensive, top range of the brand you are trialling. So either you have to purchase the top end model to get a similar outcome as with the trial, or you might be disappointed with the real world outcome of the lower level model you have chosen.
- When a hearing aid is fitted for the free trial, typically the ‘first fit’ setting is used. ‘First fit’ settings are designed to give the best initial impression without really representing the long term settings they really need for best performance in the long term.
- With free trials you are often limited to the devices the clinician has demonstrators for. These are predominantly over the ear devices. So there is a chance you do not end up with your ideal solution or the right style of hearing aid based on limited trial options.
- You might actually decide against hearing aids even though you could have benefitted as the trial normally does not allow for fine tuning adjustments.
- You might not be fully committed to give the hearing aids a proper go as you have not “skin in the game”. “It’s free so maybe I don’t need to try and get the best out of it” is an attitude that could lead to failure.

**Okay, so if a free trial is not the ideal solution, what is?**

You don't just want to buy hearing aids and hope for the best!

- Make sure the trial is with the hearing aid you will end up purchasing. If at all possible, it should be set the way it would be if you had bought it. Many clinics won’t do this as they are trusting you with very expensive stock which costs money to return to the supplier.
  
  We tend to offer these trials only to clients who have purchased from us before and are looking to upgrade.
- You could purchase the actual hearing aids that have been recommended to you and make sure you have a decent money back guarantee attached. A 60 day money back guarantee is ideal, as it allows sufficient time for your brain to adjust properly to the devices and this also allows for follow-up appointments to further fine tune the hearing aids to your unique situation.
This way you end up with the exact model and style recommended, from the ideal brand, fitted and followed-up properly. On top of that you will know what the long-term benefit might look like once you have passed the initial honeymoon period. Restocking costs may apply in case of return, but this also motivates you to give it a fair trial, which inevitably is about improving your quality of life in the long term.

Some clinics, like Value Hearing, offer a 100% 60-day money back guarantee, which removes all the risk while delivering optimal benefit.

To summarize:

- Be wary of free trials unless it is the exact style and model you were looking to purchase, fitted properly.
- Consider a money back period over a free trial, as the long term benefits outweigh the potential costs.
Hearing Aid Fitting Appointments
Hearing aid fitting appointments

When it is time for you to actually get your new hearing aids, they need to be precisely fitted and programmed to your particular hearing levels. This will involve the hearing specialist connecting the hearing devices to their computer and doing some testing of the sound levels in your ear canals.

*Ideally, they will explain this process to you and show you the results of the testing done.*

You should see your hearing target levels and a close match by the hearing instrument response levels.

Following this testing, the specialist will ask you questions about the sound quality and make adjustments according to your comments.

You should also be shown how to use and clean the devices at your fitting appointment.

**There should be a discussion on how best to start using your hearing devices.**

Some people will be okay to wear them all day directly following the fitting, while others may have to incrementally increase their usage during the first few weeks.

I see the best results when the hearing aid is initially set to levels that are comfortable for you.

This allows you to wear the hearing aid all day long, while experiencing immediate benefit without being overwhelmed.

This helps establish habits quickly. We can then tweak the hearing aid up as you get used to wearing it.

The way it used to be done was to set the hearing aid to maximum correction. You as the user then needed to gradually wear the aid more until you get used to this.

This method often leads to feeling overwhelmed, a series of additional appointments, and more frequent rejection.

*The hearing specialist should also discuss with you what to expect as you adjust to wearing hearing aids.*

*Keeping in mind that the average person waits eight years before purchasing hearing devices, it will take time to adjust to hearing certain sounds again.*

Your first follow up appointment should be scheduled for about seven to 21 days post fitting. There should be no limit to the number of follow up appointments allowed, as this is imperative in determining if your hearing devices are achieving the ideal result.
Getting Used To Wearing Hearing Aids
Getting used to wearing hearing aids

As we covered in an earlier chapter, there are two vital factors in how we hear - the ear itself and the brain. And it doesn't matter whether you're new to wearing hearing aids, or have been wearing them for years - your brain needs time to adjust.

Unfortunately this doesn't get explained to many new hearing aid wearers and this contributes to the reported 1-in-3 people who don't wear the hearing aids prescribed.

At Value Hearing we've found we can reduce that 33% down to less than 5% (and further improve on it) by focusing on the all important follow-up processes and letting our clients know what to expect when fitted with their hearing aids.

To help maximise your success, I want to talk about four key factors:

- Participation
- Preparation
- Practice, and
- Patience

**Participation**

As I wrote in the introduction to this book, you won't get the best out of your hearing aid if the choice to wear them is not 100% yours.

We see clients at our clinic who are only there because they've been nagged into it by other family members. Not surprisingly, these are often the people who do not give their best effort in working with their hearing aids.

The truth is unavoidable - it does take time to get used to hearing aids. Initially, you will be conscious of physically wearing them - in the same way you feel conscious of wearing spectacles for the first time.

Then you'll become conscious of all the sounds you can now hear. Sometimes that too can be overwhelming as the brain works out what to do about all this new sensory input.

So the number one thing you can do to make hearing aids work for you is to make sure you are an active participant in your hearing journey. You'll find it is a most empowering experience.

Of course, we are here to help you when you get stuck or need a bit of encouragement.

**Preparation**

Most clients will adapt very quickly to their hearing aids, for some it can take weeks and for others as long as four months to get used to wearing them.

So be prepared for some changes in your life, but if you work through them, you'll find the change is very much for the better.

There is something very important to know about hearing aids. Unlike spectacles, which can often deliver perfect vision in many cases, hearing devices will help you maximise your hearing but it cannot give you “20-20” hearing. The reason for this is that spectacles correct a lens issue, hearing aids typically deal with brain issues and damaged nerves in the ear unless you have a purely blockage related hearing loss (conductive hearing loss).
Being prepared for the fact that the hearing aid cannot fully restore loss, and appreciating that the device is working to maximise your hearing potential will help you avoid unrealistic expectations.

And, finally, be prepared to make a few adjustments to your daily routine to get the best from your hearing aids and to help keep them in excellent working order.

It’s important to work in partnership with your family and your hearing care professional to help make the most from your new devices.

**Practice**

This is possibly the most important of the ‘four Ps’:

- Practice handling
- Practice wearing
- Practice hearing
- Practice maintenance

**Practice handling your hearing aids.**

The more you are familiar with them, the more confident you will feel about wearing them.

If your hearing aids use batteries for instance, become familiar with opening the battery door, then taking out and reinstalling the batteries until you can manage the process with confidence. This is no easy task for people with reduced dexterity, and we encourage family members to be supportive and affirming during this phase.

Even though they look fragile, they are actually remarkably tough. Even if you do manage to break something, your audiologist will be able to fix it for you. So don’t let this worry you.

**Practice wearing your hearing aids.**

All of that new sensory input can be overwhelming at first, so wear your hearing aids for as long as you can, ideally 10 hours a day.

Some clinicians will set the volume of hearing aids on the high side to give their clients the ‘wow’ factor. However, at Value Hearing we prefer to err on the side of setting the hearing aid at a lower initial volume to help you to quickly become more familiar with sounds you’ve been missing.

One useful tip is to practice wearing hearing aids in quiet conditions (such as at home) to get used to the hearing ‘new’ sounds without having to cope with too much noise, as you would find in a shopping centre or a noisy restaurant.

**Practice hearing**

Now it’s time for some ‘brain training’.

One great activity is to go to your local park, sit down on the park bench and close your eyes. Concentrate on one type of sound - the sound of a bird in the trees, a dog barking, the rustling of the leaves, the sound of children playing on the swings, the tick-tick-tick of the wheels of a bicycle as it goes by. That will help you to isolate sounds and correctly identify them.

It will also help you learn to filter out general background noises that you can now hear, but don’t need to pay close attention to.

Practice having conversations both one-on-one and in small groups. Having new hearing aids is a great opportunity to more deeply connect with friends and loved ones again through conversation.

Turn down the TV volume to what other people in your household consider to be ‘normal’ levels and practice listening. Television news and talk shows are excellent to start with, as
the volume and the cadence of speech tend to be consistent during the length of program. If you need to, consider using closed captioning and subtitles until your brain gets used to processing and interpreting the signals it's receiving.

Another technique is to read aloud to gauge a sense of a suitable speaking volume.

Some people find it useful to keep a daily diary of experiences with a new hearing aid. Jot down your notes and observations. Be as detailed as possible and then review the evening before your first follow up visit with your audiologist to see if those early observations still hold true.

You might find that sounds you found difficult to process, like annoying background noise, or your voice sounding too loud, is less of an issue after several weeks of working with your hearing aids.

Bring your notes with you to share with your audiologist for that first post-fitting appointment as adjustments to the devices can be made at your visit. There are also a couple of online hearing training programs available that your hearing care professional can point you to.

Practice Maintenance

This is a topic all of its own and you’ll find it in the next chapter. Even though they look fragile, they are actually remarkably tough. Even if you do manage to break something, your clinic will be able to fix it for you. So don’t let this worry you.

Patience

They say patience is a virtue, and nowhere is that more true than when it comes to wearing hearing aids. There is a lot for the brain and the body to process, so don’t be too disheartened if you find yourself initially struggling.

One side effect clients report to us is feeling tired when first wearing hearing aids - and it’s no surprise! For a while, your brain is having to do a lot more work to receive, process, analyse, and interpret all the new sounds you’re hearing. That consumes a lot of energy. However, in time, you may actually find that you have more energy than before you started wearing them. This is because, once used to them, your brain has to use less effort to listen.

Let your family and friends know to be patient with you during this time. I have a useful article here on hearing your best in difficult situations which has some advice for yourself and your loved ones on how they can assist you. You can find it on our website - www.valuehearing.com.au

Practice, patience and perseverance will reward you with maximised hearing.

Everyone at Value Hearing, including myself, wish you every success with your hearing aids and we are here to help any questions you might have about any of the chapters I’ve covered in this book.

Hearing Aid and Communication Tactics for Hearing in Noise

- Communication will always be optimal with the person sitting immediately next you, increasing distance will prove to be quite challenging (even for someone with normal hearing).
- If possible make sure you have your back to the noise source. Most modern hearing aids are automatic; when in a noisy environment the hearing aid becomes more directional (forward focusing).
- If possible put the hearing aid into its directional program.
- As a last resort, reduce the overall volume of the hearing aid. This will only improve comfort, and will invariably reduce overall speech understanding in noise.

Value Hearing offers a hearing assessment like no other that uses accurate testing to pinpoint the hearing aid that will work best for you in all circumstances.
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Maintenance and Care of
Your Hearing Aids
Maintenance and Care of Your Hearing Aids

Overview

Hearing aids are modern miniature technological marvels. Like all sophisticated pieces of equipment, they need regular care and maintenance to keep them operating at peak efficiency.

There are two main parts of any hearing aid that need daily attention: the microphone (where the sound enters the hearing aid), and the receiver/speaker (where the amplified sound is delivered to your ear).

With daily wear, these ports can become blocked with wax. If that happens, the hearing aid will not deliver optimum performance.

The easiest way to ensure your hearing aids remain in tip-top condition is to make care and cleaning a daily habit.

Daily Detail

In the evening: Before going to bed, remove your hearing aids and open the battery door to disconnect the batteries. Remember to keep them in their case to avoid them being lost. In the case of recharables, place your hearing aids in their charger overnight. That means the batteries will be at full strength at the start of the day. They are designed so that you cannot overcharge them.

In the morning: Use the cleaning brush provided in your kit to remove wax which can accumulate around the microphone and receiver (don't forget that many hearing aids have two microphones). Wax hardens overnight, making it easier to brush away in the morning.

Brush downwards to help the loosened wax to fall away from the microphones.

Use the supplied cleaning cloth to wipe away any dirt or debris.

Weekly Detail

Each week, give your hearing aids a little extra TLC in the cleaning department.

The external casings of your hearing aid may need to be cleaned with a wax pick or a wire loop to gently remove any stubborn deposits. Exercise caution when using the pick around the microphone or receiver ports!

Not all hearing aids are the same. Each specific style of device requires specific cleaning. If you need any assistance with your hearing aids, please do contact Value Hearing, our team is very happy to assist.

Specific devices

Mini Receiver In The Ear/Receiver In The Ear (mRITE/RITE)

These hearing aids have a receiver/speaker that sits in your ear. At the end of the tube is an ear dome. This will need replacing from time to time, along with the white filter which sits beneath it.

To clean the dome, use a wax pick to clear out the holes at the tip of the dome. Do not stick anything longer into the speaker/receiver port, as it can damage the components. Replace the wax filter if needed.

To replace the filter, use the pen-like tool provided with your cleaning kit to remove the filter and use the other end to insert a new filter and then replace the dome.
If the dome gets fully blocked or becomes misshapen, replace the dome as required. Make sure to replace the rubber dome (if yours is fitted with this), if it gets soft. This avoids it getting stuck in your ear.

Wipe the outside of the hearing aid with a soft cloth.

**Buyer’s Tip**

**HAVE A DEDICATED MICROFIBRE CLOTH FOR CLEANING YOUR HEARING AIDS.**

**Behind The Ear (BTE)**

Behind the Ear models also have a tube but do not have the domes. Once you have removed the tubing from the hearing aid, use a vent cleaner to clear out the tubing and vent.

Use the small loop at the end of the wax brush to pick debris away from the sound outlet.

Brush over the microphone ports to remove any loose wax or debris. Then wipe the outside of the hearing aid with soft cloth.

**Buyer’s Tip**

**USE A BULB BLOWER TO FORCE THE WATER OUT OF THE TUBING TO PROMOTE QUICHER DRYING.**

**Custom Hearing Aids (ITE, ITC, CIC, IIC)**

Brush over the microphone and speaker ports to remove any loose wax. Any stubborn spots of wax can be dealt with using a wax pick that comes with your cleaning kit.

Be extremely cautious around the microphone and speaker ports as incorrect use can damage to the components inside.

Pay special attention to the hearing aid vent. Use a vent cleaner to ensure the vent is kept clear.

**Buyer’s Tip**

**STORE YOUR HEARING AID OVERNIGHT IN ITS DEHUMIDIFIER TO KEEP IT DRY.**

**Additional Tips**

**Table Talk** - When cleaning your hearing aids, place a hand towel on the surface you’re working at. This protects your hearing aids if they are accidentally dropped.

Also, don’t forget to remove your hearing aids and put them in their case whenever you’re going to the beach, planning to cool off in the pool, or going to the hairdressers.

Mishaps with hearing aids can be very expensive.

**Coming Clean** - Make sure your hands are clean and dry before cleaning your hearing aids. Also, give your designated cleaning cloth a regular wash to ensure you’re not redepositing debris back onto your hearing aids.

**Daily Does It** - Make cleaning hearing aids a regular part of your daily routine. When it becomes a habit, you’re less likely to forget about it and you can maximise years of trouble-free hearing.

**Use The Right Tools For The Job** - Use the cleaning kit provided with your hearing aid and don't improvise.
Using water, cleaning fluids and solvents may cause damage, as can using anything other the wax pick and loop provided to clean microphone and speaker ports.

**Hearing Aid Batteries Care, Safety and Use**

It's very important to take care with your hearing aid batteries but it's also simple and easy once you know what's what.

**Why do zinc air hearing aid batteries have a tab?**

Zinc air hearing aid batteries use air as an energy source, and the tab seals the air holes on the battery until they're ready for use. Once the tab is removed, it takes approximately two minutes before the hearing aid battery is activated/charged. However, it was recently discovered that five minutes was the optimal time to allow a zinc air hearing aid battery to "breathe".

Give the battery the time it needs to activate, then, at that point, the battery compartment can be closed. If not activated correctly the battery may be damaged and will not come back to normal voltage level needed!

Please remember not to remove the tab before the hearing aid battery is to be used. Reattaching the tab afterwards will not prolong the running time of the battery.

**What are button battery hazards?**

If swallowed, batteries can be a hazard both to children and pets.

In Australia, two children have died from button battery-related injuries. Each week, an estimated 20 children visit an emergency department for removal or treatment of a swallowed or inserted button battery. If a battery is accidentally swallowed, the battery can lodge in the oesophagus and burn a hole in its lining.

If you suspect a child has swallowed a button battery, immediately call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 or go to a hospital emergency room.

Do not let the child eat or drink and do not induce vomiting.

**How long is the zinc air battery’s shelf life?**

Hearing aid batteries have a minimum “shelf-life” of two years. However, this estimate cannot be guaranteed if the batteries were previously stored incorrectly.

**Where is the best place to purchase hearing aid batteries?**

We strongly recommend that you purchase your batteries from a hearing aid clinic. You can also purchase batteries online from us at valuehearing.com.au/shop, however we recommend that you stick with the popular brands (e.g. Powerone).

We don't recommend batteries from the chemist or grocery store as these batteries do not last as long (e.g. Energizer, Duracell). Only purchase if it is for emergency purposes.

**How should hearing aid batteries be stored?**

Optimal room storage temperature for storing hearing aid batteries is between 10 and 25°C. Heat may shorten the running time and a humid environment is not suitable for storage. Finally, avoid storing hearing aid batteries in the refrigerator.

If they have been stored in the refrigerator, it is best to dispose of them as they are likely to be damaged.

Contact with metal objects such as keys or coins can cause a hearing aid battery to short-circuit, so never carry individual batteries loose in a purse, wallet, or handbag.

**How long is the running time of a hearing aid battery?**

The running time of the hearing aid battery depends on the hours of use per day, the amplification and type/features of the hearing aid being used.
Bluetooth streaming has a direct influence on the running time of a battery due to the high current the hearing aids draw in this mode. As the streaming mode is activated automatically, running time of batteries will vary depending on how often and how long streaming is active over the day.

Statistics show that, in most of cases, the reasons for a short running time are not necessarily production faults, but other factors. You can read more about this on our website.

**Stay In Touch**

At Value Hearing we recommend keeping your six monthly checkup (don’t worry, we’ll remind you). We will take a look at your hearing aids and help ensure they’re operating at peak efficiency.

You can also select which aftercare program is right for you. Some of our clients receive substantial discounts on domes and filters.

If you need some additional help, you’ll find it on our easy to follow troubleshooting video guide on our website.
Travel & Your Hearing Aids
Travel and Your Hearing Aids

The sky's the limit when you have your best possible hearing. And one of the questions we're regularly asked at Value Hearing is how to successfully travel with hearing aids – especially if you're planning to fly to your destination.

If travel is in your plans, we have some helpful tips to make sure you can make the most of your adventures abroad.

Make a packing list

Conduct a review of tubing, audio shoes, domes, batteries and other accessories that you use on a regular basis. Do you have enough to last through your trip and a couple of spares, just to be sure?

We recommend giving your clinic a call a few weeks prior to departure to ensure essential consumables arrive in plenty in time.

While you're talking to your audiologist, let them know you're heading overseas, they may be able to tell you who to contact locally, should you need assistance.

Pack your old working hearing aids as a spare. Bringing them with you will bring provide peace of mind should you lose your current pair.

Another essential for your list is to pack remote or wireless accessories to give you the option of connecting your hearing aids to FM and loop systems.

An increasing number of airports are installing loop systems to assist people with hearing loss hear important announcements. Even those with perfect hearing will complain that airport announcements are difficult to understand.

Make sure you keep an eye on the departure board and sign up for SMS/text message notifications from your airline to stay up to date.

About Batteries

Take extra batteries when you travel.

If you're using rechargeable hearing aids, make sure you add the charger to your pack. Mobile phone charger battery packs (also known as powerbanks), available from places like JB Hi-Fi
and Officeworks, are a handy accessory if you’re not sure how long it might be before you can get to mains power. 

An international power adapter is also an essential must-have.

Keep spare batteries in your carry-on luggage just in case your flight might be delayed. Hearing aid batteries are allowed onboard flights.

Speak to your travel insurer about specifically itemising hearing aids in your coverage in the event of loss or damage.

To further protect your hearing aids, make sure you bring your case. For additional protection, keep the case in a ziplock plastic bag. This will protect the case (and your hearing aids!) from the risk of damage should a container leak in your baggage). Placing the hearing aid case in a pair of socks or folded up in clothing will also protect it from knocks and jostles.

**At Security**

You don’t need to remove your hearing aid to go through security checkpoints but it is well worth letting security officers know you are wearing aids, and have batteries and chargers in your carry-on luggage.

**On the flight**

If you find yourself seated in an exit row, do let your flight attendant know. Passengers seated in these rows are required to assist flight attendants in the event of an emergency. Generally anyone with any sort of disability or who are traveling with children are not seated in exit rows.

You don't need to switch your hearing aid off during takeoff – indeed, it's important to listen to the safety procedures! But if your hearing aid has any type of connectivity, you will need to switch them to flight mode when instructed by the flight attendant.

On long haul flights, preserve your batteries by switching them off when you’re ready to sleep. If you’re using rechargeables, take advantage of the USB port typically found on the entertainment console on the back of the seat in front of you to recharge your hearing aids while you sleep.

**At your destination**

Holiday at the beach? Be sure to pack your hearing aid dehumidifier or dryer.

Take advantage of any FM and loop systems at the hotel or concert venues to make the most of your holiday experience.

Make sure you put away your hearing aid case in a secure location when you are not in your room. Unfortunately, small attractive cases like the ones hearing aids come in can be a target for thieves.
Affording Hearing Aids
Affording Hearing Aids

Hearing aids can represent a significant monetary investment. Fortunately, within Australia, there are several options to help relieve the financial burden associated with purchasing hearing aids. These include programs that offer a range of free basic hearing aids; rebates on the cost of purchase; and methods of spreading payment costs.

Below is an overview of the most common ways of helping to fund hearing aids in Australia.

Office of Hearing Services (OHS)

The Australian Government Hearing Services Program is managed by the Office of Hearing Services (OHS). Eligible individuals are able to access a range of hearing services through the OHS voucher system.

These services are typically available to Centrelink pensioners, some veterans and their dependents.

Services include:

- Hearing assessments
- A range of fully subsidised basic hearing aids (or assistive listening devices)
- Ongoing support and maintenance (including battery supply), which may incur an annual fee.

Individuals under the OHS program also have the option to 'top-up' (pay out of their own pocket) in order to receive devices with additional features that are not fully-subsidised under the program.

If an individual is eligible, they can apply online to receive their voucher. This can then be taken to their choice of OHS provider in order to receive services.

Self-funded retirees and working individuals usually do not qualify.

Value Hearing has recently become accredited to provide services under this system and will be delivering the same high quality of services to clients under to the OHS system as we do to our self-funded clients.

Veterans (DVA) and Current ADF Personnel

Veterans with a DVA Gold Card or White Card (Hearing Specific), as well as current members of the ADF, are also eligible to receive services under the OHS system (outlined above).

Eligible individuals can apply online to receive their voucher.

DVA does not currently pay for top-up hearing aids. Individuals who choose a device that is not fully subsidised under the program will need to pay the difference.

You can read more about this on the Value Hearing website here.

Accessing Superannuation Early

Those who have difficulties paying for hearing aids may be eligible to access their superannuation to cover the cost. Some policies may not allow early access, therefore it is recommended to speak to the Super Fund before initiating this process.
Individuals can apply through the personal details section of their Centrelink online account, found through myGov.

To access super early, applicants will need to provide at least:

- A recent (less than 6 months old) report from your hearing care professional, and
- A quote/unpaid invoice to determine the required amount to pay for the hearing aids.

**Payment Plans/Financing through the hearing care provider**

Some hearing aid retailers provide financing options to their clients. There are both interest free and interest bearing financing available.

Interest-free payment plans are popular, but they can charge very high merchant fees (10%+ in some cases) to the retailer. This means that providers offering these, often have to inflate their prices to be able to offer these plans.

Value Hearing provides [12 months interest free payment plans](#).

**Personal Loans**

Some people choose to take out a personal loan in order to finance their hearing aids. Personal loans will incur interest so it may be beneficial to use a comparison website (such as Infochoice or Finder) to find the total cost.

There are also companies which specialise in loans for medical expenses. Again, these will usually incur interest so it pays to shop around.

The advantage of a personal loan is that it spreads the cost of hearing aids across months (or years), rather than having to pay a lump sum upfront.

Personal loans can often offer interest rates lower than those associated with some hearing aid retailers.

**Interest-Free (or Low-Interest) Credit Cards**

While some credit cards have high interest rates, others (particularly new cards) may offer an interest-free (or low-interest) period. For those able to pay off the cost of the hearing aids within this time-frame, paying by credit card may be a better alternative to a personal loan.

As with personal loans, it is advisable to research the available options and to use comparison sites in order to determine which card is best suited to the individual’s situation.

**National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**

The NDIS is a program designed to support Australians under the age of 65 with a permanent and significant disability. This support includes funding ‘assistive technology’ such as hearing aids.

At the time of writing, the scheme was still being rolled out in some places so if visiting their website, check to see if the program is now available in your location.

After checking your eligibility for the program, you can contact the NDIS on 1800 800 110 to ask for an Access Request Form.

Applicants may be asked for supporting evidence of their hearing loss and hearing needs, which a hearing care professional should be able to provide.

The scheme is still in its infancy and there are wrinkles to still iron out. Many providers are
not yet registered to provide services under NDIS, so clients who are eligible might have difficulty finding services who accept NDIS.

**Tax Rebates**

In recent years, individuals have had the ability to claim an offset for the net expense of their hearing aids. This is income tested and the ATO provides a calculator to help with this.

It is important to note that tax rules can change from year to year, and as a result, eligibility may change from year to year. When in doubt it is advisable to ask a qualified tax expert as to what is claimable.

**Private Health Insurance**

Individuals who purchase hearing aids may be eligible to receive a rebate through their Private Health Fund. Private Health cover will vary across policies, so it is important to speak to your provider in order to determine your entitlements.

Private Health funds will often have limits as to how much, and how often, people can claim for hearing aids. You generally need to be seen by a registered hearing care provider to be eligible to claim. We have some guidelines on private health insurance rebates [here](#).

**Workers Compensation**

Those who feel that their hearing loss is a result of their employment may wish to investigate the possibility of compensation. Each state varies in terms of what level of hearing loss is compensable, and those unsure should speak to their state's regulatory body.

If accepted, an individual may receive compensation in the form of hearing aids, or a lump sum. It is important to determine if compensation is a one-off event or a periodic entitlement.
Further Reading
Further Reading

The Value Hearing blog is a continually updated source of information on hearing aids, hearing loss and getting the best out of your hearing. You are welcome to sign up to our monthly newsletter if you would like to be kept up to date with the latest information on hearing, the industry and on hearing aids in general.

Below I have linked to some of our most useful articles for easy access:

**Hearing Aid Basics:**

**How do Hearing Aids work?**

**Which Types of Hearing Aids are Best?**

**What to expect from Hearing aids as a first time user**

**Can Hearing Aids cause further hearing loss?**

**Do I need one hearing aid or two?**

**Choosing a hearing aid**

**Hearing aid Myths**

**Which hearing aid is best for me?**

**Understanding different hearing aid technology levels**

**Reasons why your hearing aid might not work in noise**

**Choosing a hearing aid that will work for me in noise**

**Is an invisible hearing aid better?**
Hearing aids for when you have one “dead” ear (CROS)

Hearing Aids for Tinnitus

**Hearing Aid Features:**

The latest must-have features in hearing aids for improved hearing

The latest information on rechargeable hearing aids

Bluetooth hearing aids

**Hearing aid costs and funding options:**

Value Hearing’s price range guide

Hearing aid Funding options in Australia

**Upgrading Your Current Hearing Aids:**

How to make sure your next hearing aid is much better than the last

What has changed in hearing aids over the last 4-5 years

**Getting the Most out of your hearing aids**

How to Improve TV listening with Hearing aids

Managing Ear Wax

Handling on Hearing Aid Batteries

Hearing Aid Troubleshooting Guides

How To Hear Your Best In Difficult Situations
Getting the most benefit out of your hearing aids - Guide

Other Guides, Checklists and Books:

6 Step Checklist to finding your ideal solution

Value Hearing’s Tinnitus Self Help Guide

The cost of Untreated Hearing Loss

Upgrading Your Current Hearing Aids:

How to make sure your next hearing aid is much better than the last

What has changed in hearing aids over the last 4-5 years

Getting the Most out of your hearing aids

How to Improve TV listening with Hearing aids

Managing Ear Wax

Handling on Hearing Aid Batteries

Hearing Aid Troubleshooting Guides

How To Hear Your Best In Difficult Situations

Getting the most benefit out of your hearing aids - Guide

Other Guides, Checklists and Books:

6 Step Checklist to finding your ideal solution
Value Hearing's Tinnitus Self Help Guide

The Cost of Untreated Hearing Loss
Do you wish to work with me?

If you wish to work with me or one of my teams of qualified hearing professionals, using the proven Value Hearing method to obtaining exceptional long term outcomes, then we would love to see how we can help.

At the time of writing we have locations available on the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Chatswood (NSW), Sydney CBD, Melbourne CBD, Perth as well as in Canberra.

Feel free to call our friendly customer support team on 1300 040 592 to discuss your needs. We will answer your questions as well as we possibly can and see if we can assist you. Alternatively, you are welcome to use our instant online booking system to book an appointment at any of our locations instantly.