

Types and styles of hearing aids

- Hearing aids are now all digital
- Digital hearing aids contain at least one microphone to pick up sound, a computer chip that amplifies and processes sound, a speaker that sends the signal to your ear and a battery for power. These components are the “guts” of the hearing aid, and they are packaged into several different styles of hearing aids. When you consult with a hearing care professional, they should consider many factors and help guide you toward the best hearing aid style for you.

Hearing aids can be classified into two main groups: **in-the-ear** (ITE) styles and **behind-the-ear** (BTE) styles. Within each group are several different sizes.

- Invisible-in-the-canal (IIC) and completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids: IIC and CIC styles are the tiniest hearing aids made. They fit very deeply in the ear canal and are typically fit for mild or moderate hearing losses. Their size and ability to “disappear” when worn depend on the size of the ear canal. Because of their tiny size, they offer high cosmetic appeal for people who desire a discreet solution.
- Lyric hearing aids - While traditional hearing aids capture and process sound outside of the ear, Lyric uses the natural anatomy of the ear to amplify and give a more natural listening experience. Because Lyric is placed in the ear canal near the eardrum by a trained professional, it is 100% invisible. It promises all day hearing performance for months at a time without taking it out or having to change batteries. It can only be changed by the hearing professional and may not be suitable for all types of hearing loss.
- In-the-canal (ITC) hearing aids: ITC styles sit in the lower portion of the outer ear bowl, making them comfortable and easy to use. Because they are slightly larger than IIC and CIC styles, they have a longer battery life, are easier to handle and can fit a wider range of hearing losses.
- Low profile styles range from half-shell (HS) designs that fill half the bowl of the outer ear to designs that fill almost the entire outer ear bowl. The size of a low profile style makes it desirable for people with dexterity issues because it is easier to handle than the smaller sizes. Low profile hearing aids are large enough to accommodate helpful features like directional microphones, volume controls and program buttons.
- THE ABOVE NOTED HEARING AIDS MAY NEED MORE MAINTENANCE AND ARE NOT ALWAYS REPAIRABLE IN YOUR LOCAL CLINIC — THEY MAY HAVE TO BE SENT BACK TO THE MANUFACTURER. CHECK WITH YOUR HEARING PROFESSIONAL AS THESE STYLES MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR PARTICULAR HEARING LOSS.

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- Behind-the-ear styles have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity over the last decade thanks in part to innovations that make the tiniest BTE hearing aids some of the most cosmetically appealing with very thin ear tubes and ear tips that fade discreetly into the ear canal. They have enough physical space to house features for a variety of hearing losses, have ample battery life and are easy to handle.
- Mini BTE hearing aids with slim tubes and tips are designed to hide behind the outer ear and have ultra-thin tubing to discreetly route sound into the ear. This style is so popular that a greater variety of ear tips have become available in order to accommodate a greater degree of hearing loss with the mini BTE.
- Receiver-in-the-ear (RITE) or receiver-in-canal (RIC) hearing aids: RITE and RIC styles have the speaker built into the ear tip instead of the main body of the hearing aid. This allows the speaker of the hearing aid to be positioned closer to the eardrum while the microphone and processor sit in a tiny case behind the ear.
- BTE hearing aids that come with ear molds can fit any type of hearing loss, from mild to profound. Their longer shape follows the contour behind the outer ear and can generally house more features, controls and power than any other style of hearing aid.
- THESE HEARING AIDS ARE TYPICALLY LOWER MAINTENANCE THAN THE (ITE STYLES). THEY CONTAIN REMOVAL PARTS THAT CAN TYPICALLY BE REPLACED IN YOUR LOCAL CLINIC WHICH MINIMIZES THE NEED TO SEND THEM TO THE MANUFACTURER. THEY ARE SUITABLE FOR A WIDER RANGE OF HEARING LOSS.

Hearing aid manufacturers

There are several hearing aid manufacturers that offer the latest technology. Hearing aid companies invest heavily in research and development to bring devices to market that address the diverse needs of people with hearing loss. They also strive to offer hearing aids that can accommodate all wearers' budgets.

The best hearing aids are the ones that work for you.

Most hearing care professionals are familiar with multiple manufacturers' products and have the supplies and software they need to successfully fit their devices. When you visit a hearing care professional, you will discuss your hearing test results, lifestyle needs and budget. Your provider will assist you to select the most appropriate manufacturer and best product just for you. Most, if not all, manufacturers make their own specific assistive listening devices that work with the hearing aid to enhance the hearing experience.

Hearing aid technology

- Current hearing aid technology advances quickly with new innovations from major manufacturers each year. Most manufacturers group their products into categories based on features and capabilities, similar to how an automobile maker might categorize its vehicles.
- All modern hearing aids are digital and require professional fitting and programming by a hearing care professional. These hearing aids offer far greater flexibility than previous hearing aid generations because the programmer can set them to amplify precisely the frequencies needed for each individual. As the level of technology increases from basic to advanced, hearing aid features become more automatic and more dynamic to adjust quickly to any listening situation. Some hearing aids today even have user-centered features like voice prompts for low battery and program changes.
- Many of the hearing aids produced today use wireless technology. This allows two hearing aids to operate together as one complete system, instead of acting as two independent devices. This action mimics the way two properly functioning ears work with the brain to process sound. Additionally, wireless technology gives hearing aid wearers a greater ability to customize their experience and program their devices.
- Wireless hearing aids are often capable of connecting with external devices as well, such as music sound systems, TVs, computers and mobile phones equipped with Bluetooth technology. Bluetooth enables hearing aid wearers to connect personal electronic devices and stream signals directly to their hearing aids. Today's hearing aids do more than just help you hear better. They are sophisticated consumer electronics devices that boast amazing technology.

Hearing aid fitting

Once a hearing healthcare professional recommends hearing aids for you, a number of factors will be considered when selecting and fitting a device. The best fit for you will depend not only on the severity and type of hearing loss you have but also the following factors:

- Budget
- Cosmetic preferences
- Social preferences
- Career demands
- Hobbies
- Other physical challenges and dexterity issues
- Attitudes about technology
- Any needed accessories

Because hearing aids are such personalized marvels of technology, not every brand, style or technology level of hearing aid is suited for everyone. Even two people with the same hearing loss may end up with different hearing aids based on other selection criteria. This can make comparing and reviewing hearing aids difficult. It's best to talk to your hearing healthcare provider about what options and features are ideal for you. The focus should be on your comfort and the programs that work for your lifestyle. Not all the advanced features are necessarily a good fit. *Be sure to tell your hearing care professional about your interests and lifestyle.*

Hearing healthcare professionals will perform an initial fitting where they fine-tune features and adjust levels to ensure you are getting the most benefit from the devices. It is important to note there is an adjustment period when wearing new devices, and it takes time to get used to new hearing aids, even if you've worn some type of hearing aid for many years. Wear the hearing aids according to the instructions of your hearing healthcare professional and keep them informed of any challenges you encounter along the way.

It is essential to advocate for yourself by asking lots of questions when you visit your hearing healthcare provider. They are used to working with people from all walks of life, and most are committed to finding solutions to fit every budget. Many problems can be easy to troubleshoot at home or with the help of your hearing care provider.

Signs you may need a repair include:

- Static sounds or increased feedback
- Intermittent sound or the sound "cuts in and out"
- High levels of distortion
- Holes or cracks in the shells of ITE hearing aid styles
- Higher than normal battery drain
- Broken or missing components on the body of the hearing aid
- In some cases, if your hearing care provider cannot fix the problem, your hearing aid may need to be sent away to the manufacturer for repair. These types of repairs are often covered under a manufacturer's warranty, but your hearing care provider can advise about warranty status and any out-of-pocket costs that may be incurred.