



Ten questions to ask your Audiologist

Good for you. You've noticed you're not hearing as well as you used to and have decided it's time to have your hearing tested by a hearing healthcare professional. That's a smart decision. Untreated hearing loss can put you at risk for a variety of other health-related problems, such as depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Having questions in front of you when you visit a hearing healthcare professional can empower you to make the most of your visit.

Your initial hearing evaluation will most likely consist of three parts:

- A conversation about your health history,
- A physical examination of your inner and outer ears,
- A series of tests designed to determine your levels of hearing and speech comprehension.

Once the hearing healthcare professional explains your test results, it's your turn to ask some questions. We've assembled some of the more basic ones below in a "print and take-along" format so you can have it at your appointment.

1. What type of hearing loss do I have? Do you anticipate my hearing will change or get worse?

Understanding which type of hearing loss you have will help determine what type of treatment you need as well as how to protect your remaining hearing.

There are three different types of hearing loss:

- Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the inner ear or to the nerve pathways from the inner ear to the brain. This type of hearing loss is usually permanent and can often be treated with hearing devices.
- Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound doesn't travel effectively through the outer ear canal to the eardrum. Many times this is due to a blockage such as an ear infection, allergies, ear wax or a benign tumor. Hearing is often restored after the blockage is removed.
- Mixed hearing loss is a combination of both sensorineural and conductive hearing loss. You may have either one — or a combination of both.

Stephanie E. McGuire, Au.D., F-AAA
Doctor of Audiology
Board Certified in Audiology



2. Do both ears have the same hearing loss?

One of your feet is most likely (slightly) bigger than the other and your eyes probably have different prescriptions, too, so it's not too much of a stretch to understand that one ear may hear better than the other. In fact, according to a recent study conducted by Yvonne Sininger of the University of California at Los Angeles, the left and right ear actually hear differently from one another. The left ear is better at receiving information from music, emotion and intuition while the right ear is more tuned in to speech and logic. That may explain why those with greater hearing loss in the left ear may find themselves less able to understand a family member's moods or arguments while those with greater hearing loss in the right ear may lose some of their logical reasoning abilities.

3. Do I need a hearing aid for both ears?

While you might not think you need to wear hearing aids in both ears, ask your hearing healthcare professional. You may not, depending on the severity of your hearing loss, but if you do they can explain why it's easier for your brain to interpret sound better with amplification in both ears. And if you do need two, take heart. According to the Better Hearing Institute, about 90 percent of patients need hearing aids for both ears.

4. Which hearing aid is best for my particular type of hearing loss and lifestyle?

There are a variety of hearing devices on the market today, each with features designed to fit specific types of hearing loss as well as unique lifestyles. The more information you give your hearing healthcare professional about your daily activities and listening environments, the more likely she will be to recommend the best hearing device for you. Take a few minutes before your appointment to list the things you like to do on a daily and weekly basis — include recreational activities as well as social situations and your work environment. This will help you cover all the bases when it's time to ask this particular question.

5. If I purchase hearing aids from you, will I have any additional costs?

In many hearing centers, follow up hearing care is included in the purchase price of your hearing devices. Some hearing centers include the price of adjustments, repairs, batteries and check-ups while others do not. Make sure you understand what is included so you can budget for the remaining costs, if necessary.

6. How often do you need to check or adjust my hearing aids?

Stephanie E. McGuire, Au.D., F-AAA
Doctor of Audiology
Board Certified in Audiology



Think of the last time you used a pair of binoculars. Remember how the image you were viewing came into focus as you adjusted the lens? Hearing aids can be similar. It may take a few adjustments in order to help you hear your best. Each hearing center will have a different philosophy on what kind of follow up is best for their patients.

7. How long will these hearing aids last?

Like any piece of electronic equipment, hearing aids will eventually wear out. And, although your hearing healthcare professional won't be able to tell you exactly how long they will last, they may be able to give you a good idea. Asking this question also opens up another good conversation about how to care for your hearing devices so that you can maximize their performance and life span.

8. What type of warranty is available for these hearing devices?

Different hearing device manufacturers have different warranties for their products. Knowing the warranty basics for your particular devices gives you the knowledge you need to determine whether or not to purchase additional insurance or make sure they are protected from loss and theft through your homeowners' policy.

9. What happens if I purchase hearing aids and am not satisfied with their performance?

Many hearing centers offer a trial period when they fit you for hearing aids so you can make sure you're satisfied before you even write the check. Find out if your hearing center offers something similar and, if so, understand the details.

10. Does my insurance cover the cost of these hearing aids?

Hearing aids are expensive medical devices and not all insurance plans cover their cost. If your plan doesn't provide coverage and you can't afford to pay for them yourself, the hearing center staff may be able to help you find alternative sources of financial help.

Stephanie E. McGuire, Au.D., F-AAA
Doctor of Audiology
Board Certified in Audiology