



# THE TRUE COST OF HEARING AIDS



If you, or someone you care about, needs hearing aids, you've likely "Googled" hearing aids or hearing aid costs and have found a wide range of information, including this e-book.

We understand why you'd ask, "How much do hearing aids cost?" The honest answer is, "That depends." It depends on the hearing loss, hearing aid features, professional services, insurance coverage, and many other factors.

In this e-book, we'll explain the many issues you should consider when looking for new hearing aids, as well as the hidden costs associated with hearing loss, including the impact on job performance and health.

## WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT TO PAY FOR HEARING AIDS?

In a professional practice such as Associated Audiologists, the out-of-pocket cost of hearing aids can range anywhere from \$675 per ear to \$3,200 per ear. The range is influenced by the technology in the device, as well as the professional services included with your purchase. In most cases, you can take that figure times two because most patients require two hearing aids to hear their best.



# FACTORS DETERMINING COST

Nearly every manufacturer offers varying performance levels at different price points—think good, better, best. Almost all hearing aids today utilize digital technology, and rely on one to several tiny microchips to process sound.

The price of the hearing aids will increase as the sophistication of the technology inside increases. Lower-cost hearing aids that include only basic technology are limited in their ability to be customized, but they may be able to meet basic needs, depending on your degree of hearing loss and your lifestyle.

If you are looking to include many advanced technological features, such as advanced speech processing, smartphone integration, wind reduction technology, self-learning features, and binaural processing capabilities, you can expect to pay more for your hearing aids. As the technology becomes more sophisticated, your hearing aids are able to make more intelligent decisions about incoming sounds and process them with greater precision.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR HEARING AIDS TO DO?

On the surface, this might seem like a silly question. You want them to help you hear better, right? But if you love being outside, for example, you may want a device with the capability to reduce wind noise. If you're a sophisticated smartphone user who enjoys listening to music, audio files, or phone calls, then you may consider models that offer better connectivity to your smartphone or other technology you use.



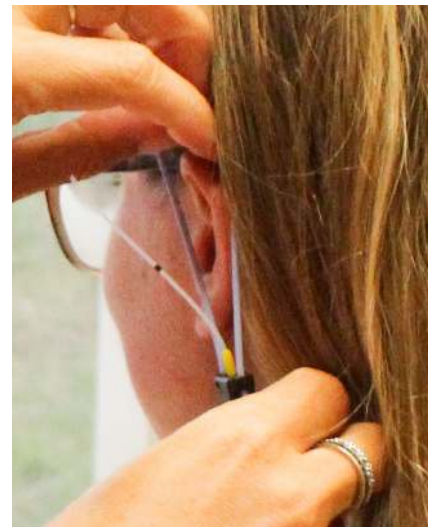
As part of your hearing evaluation, be sure to tell your audiologist what your most challenging listening situations are and the goals that are most important to you. This will help the audiologist recommend the best technology for your individual circumstances.



## SERVICE

Even though you may be able to purchase hearing aids for a lower price, in the long run, that may not be the best decision for you. Often, lower cost hearing aids are pre-programmed devices that aren't custom-fit to your individual hearing loss or physical properties of your ear. Practices that sell hearing aids only at a lower price point may also bill adjustments and follow-up appointments necessary to customize the device separately. Be sure you understand what's included with your hearing aid estimate. If it's only the cost of the device, and you need several adjustments to fine-tune it, service charges could quickly add up to more in the long run.

On the other hand, a full-service, professional audiology practice may include services such as fitting, verification, programming, review of use/care, follow-up appointments, ongoing maintenance, and device warranties in the initial



cost. Manufacturer warranties cover the cost of the manufacturer's parts and services, but do not cover the professional services that are often also needed. Many manufacturers also offer warranties to cover the cost of a replacement device should it become lost or damaged beyond repair.

An audiologist should be able to explain the technological differences between hearing aid features and be able to help teach you how to use those, and also outline the long-term required services and maintenance, including potential fees associated with those.

Look for an audiologist who works with worldwide manufacturers so you can have your hearing aids serviced almost anywhere. Beware of providers or franchises that only offer one brand of hearing aid. Further, be educated about re-branded, or company-branded, technology that may not be serviced by other providers, or by the original provider if the corporate contract is not renewed (for example: Kirkland brands, Audibel, etc.).

You also should look for a clinic that offers wax removal, a common service that many patients need, but is not typically available from many retail providers. Your audiologist should offer a loaner program when appropriate in the event your hearing aid needs to be sent to the manufacturer for repair. And, be sure to ask what happens if you have an urgent problem. Does the clinic offer same-day repairs?



Finally, but most importantly, ask how the clinic verifies that your hearing aids are performing optimally. Only 20 to 30 percent of hearing-related practices in the nation use real-ear technology to verify that the hearing aids they fit meet the recommended prescriptions for proper hearing and safety. This is the best way to be sure you get your money's worth when buying hearing aids, and to be sure you are truly hearing your best.



# INSURANCE COVERAGE

If you have health insurance, don't assume it will pay for hearing aids. Coverage varies widely. Most insurers, including Medicare in some cases, cover the cost of a hearing evaluation, but many will only pay a specified amount toward the purchase of hearing aids, while others will not cover any cost related to the hearing devices.

The Associated Audiologists staff is experienced in researching these questions for our patients and can assist you in learning more about your coverage.

# FINANCING OPTIONS

Finance programs are often available for patients who don't have insurance and require healthcare services and devices. Most of these services offer convenient monthly payment options and there are no annual fees, prepayment penalties, or up-front costs. You can choose from a longer-term plan with a fixed interest rate or a short-term plan with no interest, depending on your financial needs.



# A WORD OF CAUTION...

1. When it comes to hearing aids, the old adage applies: "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." Many advertisers use misleading strategies marketed as deals so watch out for these common claims:
2. **"Field trial"**—These ads offer patients the opportunity to take part in a field trial for new technology. This term is misleading because it sounds like you're getting in on technology that's being tested, when in reality, these trials happen long before the technology is offered to the public, and is regulated tightly by the Food and Drug Administration. This is just a way to get you to call and schedule an appointment and is considered an unscrupulous business practice by professional audiologists. Businesses that participate in legitimate research typically ask for or contact qualified individuals who meet strict study eligibility requirements rather than a general public advertisement. In addition, a practice or vendor study usually has clearly stated study objectives and guidelines.
3. **"Little to no cost"**—It's very rare that insurance covers the entire price of hearing aids. Generally, the "low-cost" hearing aids advertised are entry-level devices that may indeed be less expensive, but often don't meet the individual and unique needs of users. When you schedule an appointment with someone who uses this tactic, don't be surprised if they try to sell you more expensive technology.
4. **"Free hearing tests"**— These are not comprehensive evaluations and usually just include hearing screenings. They typically are not a part of a medical record, don't belong to the person being tested, and are usually not transferable. Full hearing evaluations from qualified audiologists determine if you have a hearing impairment and can be shared with your primary care provider. Audiologists then provide the necessary recommendations specifically tailored to your hearing loss.



## QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK BEFORE YOU PURCHASE HEARING AIDS

1. Are you an audiologist?
2. What are your qualifications?
3. How many hearing aid manufacturers do you work with?
4. Which hearing aid manufacturer do you prefer and why?
5. What is the hearing aid assessment period and return policy?
6. If I am out of town, where else can I have my hearing aids serviced?
7. Does the hearing aid have universal/open software so that it can be adjusted by another professional if I choose?
8. How do you handle emergencies or same-day repairs?
9. Do you offer "loaners" if my hearing aids need to be sent to the manufacturer for repair?
10. How do you check or verify that my hearing aids are working as prescribed?
11. Do you accept insurance benefits?
12. Will you check my coverage for me?
13. Do you have patient reviews and satisfaction data from patients available?
14. Will you provide me with a price quote?
15. What type of warranty and service does that quote include?



# HIDDEN COSTS

When asked about the costs of hearing loss, most people cite the cost of a visit to their audiologist, the costs associated with any tests to determine the extent of loss, and the cost of hearing aids. Few people think about the “hidden” costs associated with hearing loss. These are the costs associated with day-to-day tasks that become difficult when you have problems hearing, as well as the long-term health consequences of not being able to hear your best. Here are a few of the “hidden costs” associated with not treating your hearing loss.

# IMPROVE YOUR EARNING POWER

A national study from the Better Hearing Institute found that people with untreated hearing loss lose as much as \$30,000 in income annually, depending on their degree of hearing loss. This doesn't even measure the impact that unaddressed hearing loss has on worker productivity, absenteeism, and presenteeism.

The good news is that most people with hearing loss can benefit from hearing aids. And today's high-tech, sleek, and virtually invisible hearing aids are better than ever. They make it easier to hear sounds and people from all directions and in a variety of listening situations. Many hearing aids sit discreetly and comfortably behind the ear or inside the ear canal and are wireless, so they can interface easily with other high-tech devices like smartphones and conference-room speaker phones. New “smart” hearing aids and rechargeables are the latest innovations that can ensure you don't miss out on important conversations on the job, and take full advantage of your earning power.

# BETTER HEALTH

Hearing loss is often described as an “invisible” health problem. Because hearing loss usually happens gradually, many people don't realize what they're missing. And even more importantly, researchers have discovered significant links between untreated hearing loss and other serious health issues, including cognition, dementia, depression, falling, and overall physical and mental health.

Here is why treating hearing loss sooner rather than later is not only good for your relationships, but for your brain:



- **Cognition:** Research shows an untreated mild hearing loss can significantly increase your brain's cognitive work load. You have to put in so much more effort to perceive and understand what is being said that you divert resources away from storing what you have heard into your memory. This means hearing loss not only affects your ability to “hear” sound accurately, but it also affects higher-level cognitive functioning.
- **Dementia:** Researchers at Johns Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging found seniors with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing or treat their hearing loss. Another study by hearing experts at Johns Hopkins found older adults with untreated hearing loss are more likely to develop problems thinking and remembering than older adults whose hearing is normal.
- **Brain shrinkage:** Results of a study by researchers from Johns Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging found that although the brain becomes smaller with age, the shrinkage seems to be fast-tracked in older adults with untreated hearing loss.

- **Falling:** A Johns Hopkins study showed that people in middle age (40-69) with mild hearing loss were nearly three times more likely to have a history of falling. Experts suggest the intensive listening effort demanded by unaddressed hearing loss may take cognitive resources away from what is needed for balance and gait.
- **Depression:** Several studies have found a link between depression and hearing loss. A Johns Hopkins study found that older adults with untreated hearing loss were 57 percent more likely to have deep episodes of stress, depression or bad mood than their peers with normal hearing.

Other research points to connections between diabetes, heart disease and hearing loss. At this point, we can't say that treating hearing loss will prevent dementia or lower the risk of falling, but we are seeing significant connections between hearing loss and other serious health issues. Better hearing helps us be our best, no matter what our age.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Searching for and buying hearing aids can be confusing, making it important for you to research brands and audiologists before making a purchase. Only two groups of professionals can sell this product: audiologists and hearing aid dispensers. Buyers need to remember this when shopping and looking at hearing aid ads. Buying hearing technology from another source doesn't provide the quality care or support needed.

Audiologists diagnose and treat hearing loss, and should have doctoral-level credentials. Dispensers pass a state exam to earn their dispensing license.

The scope of practice for an audiologist is much more extensive than for a hearing aid dispenser. Not only can an audiologist assist in choosing hearing aids that match your needs and budget, but they also can diagnose and manage other issues related to hearing, such as tinnitus, sound sensitivity, dizziness and balance disorders.



# ABOUT US



Associated Audiologists, Inc., is the region's leader in audiologic care for hearing, tinnitus, and balance disorders. Established in 1985, the practice is independent and locally owned by Timothy C. Steele, Ph.D., president.

Associated Audiologists has grown to include more doctoral-level audiologists than any practice in the area, with six convenient locations to serve you. Our audiologists have allied health staff privileges at Shawnee Mission Medical Center, Saint Luke's South Hospital, Saint Luke's/Cushing Hospital, and Saint Luke's East Hospital.

The Associated Audiologists team features professionals who use advanced diagnostic and verification technology to diagnose and treat hearing loss. The practice offers digital hearing aid products from the world's most respected manufacturers backed by unparalleled service. We also have experts who specialize in diagnosing and managing tinnitus and sound sensitivity, and dizziness and balance disorders.

Each of our associates is a doctoral-level audiologist. As part of their four-year doctoral training, these audiologists spend a final year completing an externship experience supervised by a licensed audiologist. Our audiologists are members of the Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA) and hold certificates of clinical competence in audiology from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Many of our team members are also adjunct professors at the University of Kansas Medical Center.



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