

Personalizing The Way You Hear The World

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Hearing aids come in all kinds of models, sizes and technologies, and custom fit is the name of the game – there’s certainly no single device that works best for everyone.

“I think the biggest thing that goes wrong in a hearing aid fitting is when people start out with unrealistic expectations,” says Christine Helik, a Hearing Instrument Specialist in practice for 37 years. “They think it’s like reading glasses – you put them on, you can read, you’re done. It doesn’t happen like that with a hearing aid.”

In fact, there’s a lot to consider when you’re in the market for hearing aids, which means it’s essential to work with a Hearing Instrument Professional who can decipher your specific needs.

Finding your match

At your first visit, a Hearing Instrument Specialist will conduct a number of tests and take a case history to determine the most appropriate hearing device (in some cases, medication or surgical intervention will be a better solution). He or she will look at the nature and degree of

your hearing loss, the size and shape of your ear, your lifestyle, cosmetic concerns, and even your physical dexterity. (If you have arthritis, for example, a small hearing aid might prove difficult to manipulate).

"Be sure to ask about government programs that can help pay for the device, such as the Ministry of Health's Assistive Devices Program in Ontario."

You'll also need to discuss the situations that cause you the most problems. If you are frequently in crowded social situations such as parties or restaurants, for instance, you might need relatively sophisticated hearing aids, while a more basic model would likely suffice if you spend the majority of your time in quiet or watching TV.

Like sizes, prices for hearing aids vary greatly so your budget is also a determining factor. Be sure to ask about government programs that can help pay for the device, such as the Ministry of Health's Assistive Devices Program in Ontario.

Your practitioner will also explain how to insert, remove and clean your hearing aids and how to operate the controls and change the batteries. Before the end of the trial period (at least 30 days in Ontario), your practitioner will follow up with you to ensure that the hearing aids are working at an optimal level for your hearing loss.

Technological improvements

Adam Perrie, who has practised as a Hearing Instrument Specialist for the past 24 years, says that modern digital hearing aids can be fine-tuned to provide amplification exactly where needed. He points out that older hearing aids amplified all sounds, meaning that patients would constantly need to turn the volume up or down. "I think we have had more improvement in hearing technology in the last 10 years than probably in the previous 40 years."

Taking precautions online

Perrie cautions consumers against buying hearing aids sold over the Internet. "They are kind of a one-size fits all, which doesn't at all work with hearing aids," he says. "There's probably upwards of 40 some combinations of your basic hearing loss and an Internet hearing aid can't be tuned at all."

Also a Hearing Instrument Specialist can't help someone who has bought a hearing aid over the Internet because they can't adjust the size, the fit or the comfort. "It's typically a chunk of plastic with really basic electronics in it."

These type of hearing devices typically just make things louder, says Perrie. "It's like listening to an old AM radio. You can get it loud but you can't get the clarity." It's a common misconception that you just need to make things louder; in fact, clarity is the concern, not

volume, he adds.

Although it may seem more convenient to purchase hearing aids online, it will only lead to further inconvenience, discomfort and potential damage long-term, as it will not be a quality device delivering quality sound. Instead invest your time seeing a Hearing Instrument Specialist and find the perfect solution for you.

Katherine O'Brien