

# How To Choose An Audiologist

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September 2020

If you are on the hunt for an audiologist to treat your conductive, sensorineural, or mixed hearing loss, you have much to think about. We all have different hearing needs, and we want the perfect audiologist, someone providing personalized care while helping us to navigate through the maze of technology. How does one find such a person?

Many ENT practices have an audiologist as part of their healthcare team. You may have met an audiologist while your ENT physician was performing tests to diagnose the root of your hearing loss. If that is not the case, then ask your doctor to recommend someone. Your local chapter of Hearing Loss Association of America might also be a source, as would a friend, family member, or colleague, suffering from hearing loss. Visit the American Academy of Audiologists website and find a list of member audiologists in your area.

With a list of perspective audiologists in hand, you will want to check their credentials. Audiologists usually hold a Ph.D. or an Au.D. degree. Audiologists with a Ph.D. train in clinical areas, teaching, and research. Au.D. audiologists are clinical audiologists. Some Ph.D. audiologists teach in Au.D. programs. Others specialize in various areas of hearing loss including, tinnitus therapy, balance and vestibular disorders, and pediatrics.

Most states have licensing requirements. Kentucky stipulates that their audiologists have a Ph.D. or Au.D. degree. Before they can be licensed, audiologists must successfully pass the Praxis Exam, a national exam determining clinical competency. Kentucky does license Hearing Aid Dispensers. These individuals typically work at Costco where they dispense hearing aids and do basic hearing exams. The state also allows registered nurses or other medical personnel to perform hearing tests if they work under a licensed physician. Kentucky will

grant a license to an audiologist coming from another state if they are in good standing with the rules of their current state. Audiologists, holding a Masters in Audiology prior to 2007, can renew their licenses.

Finding an audiologist who is a good fit is key to your hearing health. I have been with my current audiologist for 14 years and would not go elsewhere for my hearing care. When making the choice to go with my current audiologist, I took into consideration driving distance, how appointments are made (I can make an appointment online), and how long I had to wait before I was seen. In my case, it was less than a week.

Most audiologists have websites. It is a good idea to look them over to see what types of hearing devices the audiologist works with. The best audiologists offer aids and accessories from all the major hearing aid manufacturers: ReSound, Oticon, Widex, Starkey, Phonak and Signia (formerly Siemens) Be wary of the audiologist only carrying one brand of hearing aid.

If you need a cochlear implant, recognize that not all audiologists work with implants. These devices require a different skill set. You will need to see a surgeon and audiologist specializing in this area.

Some other factors you might consider in choosing an audiologist include, how long the audiologist has been in business, whether or not they've received awards, whether or not they repair hearing aids, the frequency of hearing exams, and their overall willingness to work with you. As part of your visit, your audiologist should speak with you about your lifestyle and your hearing needs. This is key in determining what make and model of device will be right for you.

I've purchased many pairs of aids from my audiologist, and I like that his pricing includes a package deal: an annual hearing test, initial fittings, three or four follow-up visits, and immediate appointments for aids that need repair. As a longtime customer, my audiologist lets me try new technology free of charge for thirty days. He ensures that I wear my aids properly and that I understand the functionality of my peripheral devices. When possible, he repairs my aids onsite. When he has to send out my aids, he uses overnight mail, which guarantees the

return of my aids in a week or less. Audiologists, who do not provide a fixed price for aids and exams, tend to charge less, but you will have to pay for follow-up visits and future hearing tests. Hearing aids and accessories are expensive. Some audiologists offer finance options.

Choosing an audiologist and developing a relationship with that person takes time and patience. You might not find the best audiologist on your first trial. But when you do, stick with that person. Fewer people are entering audiology training programs and older audiologists are retiring, leaving a gap for those of us who need help treating our hearing loss.