

OVERVIEW OF ADULT HEARING HEALTH CARE

Types of Hearing Devices

The American Academy of Audiology believes it's important for you to have accessible, affordable, and appropriate hearing devices. You should be involved with the selection of a hearing device; however, it is the combination of the services of the trained audiologist and the technology that promote successful hearing loss treatment. It is not in your best interest to begin using any hearing device without the recommendation of an audiologist. It can be helpful for one to be familiar with the different types of devices available now and on the horizon. Table 1 is an overview of the different types of devices. More information is available in the Guide to Adult Hearing Care.

Disclaimer: The information in this guide is not intended to replace the services of a qualified audiologist and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of any type or category of hearing device. Rather, this information is available to enhance a consumer's conversations with audiologists or other healthcare providers about hearing care and hearing devices.

Table 1: Types of Hearing Devices

	Description	Who Can Benefit	When to Use	How to Obtain	Where to Obtain	Considerations
Hearing Aid	A medical device regulated by the FDA as a class I or II wearable sound-amplifying device that is intended to compensate for impaired hearing.	All ages; most cases	Generally an appropriate consideration for any type of hearing loss. Should be utilized under the care of a qualified provider.	Following a comprehensive evaluation (hearing test and hearing needs assessment), a device is ordered, fitted, and programmed specifically to the individual's needs by the audiologist.	Audiologist or other hearing care provider	There are many different kinds of hearing aids, and a qualified hearing care provider can help the consumer in making the selection that best fits the individual's needs and lifestyle. The device typically includes, or has the option to include, a device warranty, follow-up services, and access to a provider for other supplemental care. Might be additional cost above hearing device; not usually covered by insurance.
Wireless Connectivity/ Accessories	Remote microphones, personal neckloop systems, FM systems, Bluetooth® phone systems, TV streaming systems, and others.	All ages	Supplement hearing aids or implants in challenging listening situations such as over distances or in noise, or for easy use of other technologies such as phones and personal electronic devices.	Some accessories are designed specifically for use with one brand of hearing device and must be ordered through the hearing care provider. Generic or globally compatible systems are available from the hearing provider as well as online providers.	Hearing care provider; some online retailers	
Hearing Implant	A medical device regulated by the FDA as class II (bone-anchored implant) or class III (cochlear, middle ear, or auditory brainstem implant) wearable sound-amplifying device that is intended to compensate for impaired hearing.	All ages; sensorineural, conductive, or mixed hearing loss (varies based on type of implant)	Generally considered when traditional hearing aids can't provide optimal hearing or speech understanding due to particular types of hearing loss.	Candidacy for a hearing implant is determined by traditional hearing testing, a specialized hearing evaluation with an audiologist, and surgical evaluation.	Hearing care provider (usually affiliated with ear-nose-throat practice or hospital)	Hearing implants are not a more high-tech version of other hearing devices. Rather, these devices are appropriate for a subset of individuals with hearing loss. Hearing implants are usually viewed by insurances as durable medical equipment (not hearing aids), and most are covered by Medicare and commercial payers.
Personal Sound Amplification Products	Wearable electronic devices that minimally increase the volume level of sound.	Adults with normal hearing	Amplification for intended use in restricted listening environments to accentuate hearing. Ideally recommended by a hearing care professional.	Can be purchased over the counter.	Online, retailers, hearing care provider	Not regulated by the FDA; not intended for use by persons with hearing loss. Potential risks are damage to the ear through over-amplification, diminished hearing ability, and impaction of earwax.
OTC Hearing Aid	Will be an FDA regulated wearable sound-amplifying device that is intended to compensate for impaired hearing. Not yet on the market.	Adults with mild sensorineural hearing loss	Not on the market.	Not on the market. An audiologic evaluation will determine necessity and the type of hearing loss.	Not on the market.	Not projected to be on the market until after 2020.