

Make sure it is modern and professional

how to CHOOSE A HEARING AID CENTER

In America today, there are perhaps as many as 28 million people who have some type of hearing loss. For most of them, the loss was something that happened gradually over the course of years, perhaps even decades. Hearing loss usually follows a pattern, with the telltale signs often so subtle they are overlooked: Words begin to sound alike; you have difficulty understanding in public places; activities that once were fun, becoming frustrating, even embarrassing, without really knowing why. In many cases, it falls to family members and close friends, whose lives are equally impacted, to notice the differences first.

One of the most important things we know about hearing loss is that it will usually get worse over time. But here is something that can be done to help. When you come to the point in life where you become concerned about your hearing or that of a loved one, the choice of what to do about it will be yours to make. Here are some things to look for when choosing a hearing aid center.

TESTING YOUR HEARING

To help determine which style of hearing instrument is best for you, professional testing is next. These tests are painless and take less than an hour. When searching for a hearing aid center, ask if professional testing is offered. Ask the price. A modern hearing center will offer professional testing at no charge.

Audiometric Testing is used to help determine the minimum levels at which you are able to hear sounds, something called the "threshold." On modern equipment, all you need to do is to indicate through a simple "Yes" or "No" response, or by pushing a button, to tell the hearing professional if you heard a particular sound.

In Loudness Growth Testing, you are able to indicate not just whether you heard a sound, but how you perceive that sound. Was it too soft, was it comfortable, was it too loud? Both types of tests are conducted at a variety of frequencies and loudness to help obtain an accurate result.

Word Discrimination testing helps determine your ability to understand speech at levels that are comfortable to you.

STATE-OF-THE-ART INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT

A modern hearing aid center should have a professional fitting system. Your hearing professional will need to determine your comfort levels for individual sounds. This technology will be used to program a hearing instrument to your specific hearing loss.

Use of a Video Otoscope gives you the opportunity to actually view color images of your ear canal and determine whether your hearing problems are due to something like a build-up of ear wax, instead of an actual hearing loss. A common type of hearing loss is known as sensorineural, commonly referred to as "nerve loss." With this, damage to the inner ear and/or the auditory nerve is the cause of hearing loss. Individuals with sensorineural hearing loss most commonly report difficulty understanding speech. Conductive and mixed hearing losses, less common than sensorineural, are related to damage or malformation of the outer and/or middle ear. These losses usually require medical attention.

The specialized equipment and the trained professionals at a modern hearing aid center will discover any hearing deficiencies and recommend proper hearing instruments to compensate for any problems.

Once a hearing aid (or aids) has been chosen, testing will continue, to fine tune the instrument to your individual deficiencies.

Reality Room Technology gives your hearing professional an opportunity to measure the instrument's performance using the everyday sounds of life. The testing is simple, yet it ensures your hearing aid is giving optimum performance. Be patient; it is normal to have a few return visits to your hearing aid center to fine tune the hearing aid to best benefit your hearing.

As you research a hearing aid center, ask about their testing services and if they are included in the price. Ask if the return visits for adjustments are all part of the total cost, or does each adjustment visit bring an additional charge?

MAINTENANCE

Hearing instruments are amazing devices, especially when you consider the environment they function in. Heat, moisture and foreign substances can accumulate and affect performance, or even interrupt operation.

Proper preventive care and maintenance go a long way toward ensuring trouble-free performance. This includes daily cleaning as well as regular examinations by your hearing professional. Be sure the hearing aid center you choose will teach you the proper way to keep your instrument maintained. A modern hearing aid center is always happy to inspect, make basic repairs or even provide factory reconditioning for your instrument if needed. Many centers offer attractive pricing through coupons or ads in the newspaper. Take advantage, but remember, make your choice by professional service, not just by price.

PROTECT YOUR HEARING

Use the earplugs whenever you are around loud noise. Don't worry about how it looks, it is your hearing that you are protecting and that is far more important. ■

Trust your hearing to a professional

Modern hearing aids are miniature marvels of audio technology. Be confident that the hearing aid center you use employs trained and certified personnel. Some manufacturers license or register staff that will be working with their product. Look for a hearing aid center that has this registration or licensing. This will assure you that you have top-quality support.

Hearing loss can be devastating to life

It happens gradually over time for most people, slowly but surely causing more and more difficulty in being able to cope with life normally. Sometimes an event like an accident or extremely loud noise can cause sudden hearing loss. Steps can be taken to compensate for any deficiency and return you to a more normal life experience.

Testing can reveal the loss and aid in selection of the best instrument to compensate.

A modern hearing aid center will have trained personnel and state-of-the-art technology to diagnose any hearing deficiency. The staff will be certified by the manufacturer to choose the best

instrument or instruments that will allow you to hear more normally and to fully participate in the life around you again.

Proper maintenance can assist in long term hearing. Certified, trained personnel at a modern hearing aid center will teach you how to keep your instrument working at its best. If you have a problem, they will make repairs or have it factory reconditioned. A professional hearing aid center is in business to provide better hearing for people just like you.

Use earplugs to protect your hearing when you are exposed to loud music or noise.

