

Self-Fitting Hearing Aids

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Audiology Australia supports the provision of hearing aids for all clients that have been diagnosed, through appropriate clinical consultation, as benefiting from the assistance of a hearing aid. As the peak body for the health profession of audiology, Audiology Australia acknowledges that self-fitting hearing devices¹ can be beneficial for clients with mild to moderate hearing loss.

This guide has been developed to assist clients seeking to purchase a self-fitting hearing aid with understanding some of the challenges associated with fitting their own hearing aid. In all cases, Audiology Australia recommends the involvement of an accredited audiologist in the diagnosis of hearing loss and, where necessary, support of clients, either face-to-face or through teleaudiology, with the adjustment of their preferred hearing device.

Hearing Aids are a Medical Device

Hearing aids are complex medical devices. In Australia, hearing aids are registered medical devices listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods. These medical devices go through an evaluation process with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to ensure they meet the required standard for a hearing aid. For the most part, these devices will be provided to you through a supportive process involving medical practitioners and audiologists. However, increasingly, hearing aids are being made available for sale online with instructions to allow you to 'self fit' the hearing aid to your ear.

Role of the Audiologist in Protecting Hearing Health

Audiologists are tertiary educated health professionals who work with clients of all ages to help them to preserve, manage and improve their hearing, their ability to process and understand sounds, and their balance.

Audiologists can perform advanced diagnostic tests and tailored counselling and communications strategies to ensure that you are able to achieve the best hearing for most listening situations. This counselling may involve assisting you to get the most from your hearing device and ensuring that you obtain the amplification outcomes which best suit your circumstances. Quality sound amplification can be best achieved through a hearing aid that is professionally fitted to your ear by a trained and accredited audiologist.

Considerations for Purchasing a Self-Fitting Hearing Aid

Self-fitting hearing aids can be an attractive solution for the management of your hearing loss. They can be a cost effective solution to treating mild to moderate hearing loss and may increase the accessibility of

¹ Self-fitting hearing devices are categorised as hearing devices worn by individuals with audiometric hearing loss or a self-perceived hearing difficulty and does not require the device to be fitted by a health care professional. Individuals with self-fitting hearing devices select their own amplification parameters. Over-the-Counter (OTC) hearing aids belong to the category of self-fitting hearing devices.

Audiology Australia is aware of a new and emerging category of wearable technology known as hearables. Hearables is a broad term used to describe electronic technologies that are incorporated into devices or accessories worn by individuals in or on the ear (Ear Science Institute Australia). Under this definition, hearing aids may potentially be categorised as a hearable. However, it is important to note that unlike hearing aids, not all hearables are designed with the main purpose of addressing hearing loss and/or to custom fit to an individual's hearing needs.

hearing health care, particularly for those living in rural and remote regions. However, it is important to be aware of a couple of things when considering the purchase of a self-fitting hearing aid.

Has an audiologist been involved in your decision to purchase the hearing aid?

To safeguard your long term hearing health, it is important that an audiologist is involved in the diagnosis of your hearing loss. Hearing loss may be caused by a variety of factors, some of which may be better treated through surgery or other medical advice. If that is the case, purchasing a hearing aid might not be the best solution for your particular clinical needs. Trained and accredited audiologists possess the skills necessary to properly diagnose the cause of your hearing loss and make the most suitable recommendations for treatment.

Additionally, the use of a hearing aid when it is not medically required may result in additional noise injury through improper amplification. In these circumstances, the use of a hearing aid may actually make your long term hearing health worse.

Are you comfortable with the process for fitting and adjusting your hearing aid?

Self-fitting hearing aids require a certain level of comfort following unfamiliar instructions and may require access to hardware such as a proprietary interface, computer, smartphone or tablet. Most people have never self-administered a hearing test before and the process of fitting and adjusting a hearing aid can require some fine tuning. It is important that you feel comfortable with the instructions for selecting and fitting your chosen device. And if you do not feel comfortable, that you seek the assistance of an audiologist to help measure your hearing and guide you through the process of fitting your hearing aid. This assistance can be provided either face-to-face or through a teleaudiology consultation, depending on your chosen hearing health care provider.

While some clients may successfully measure their own hearing and adjust their devices, research suggests that some participants using a self-fitting hearing aid will struggle to adjust their device appropriately (Humes et al. 2017).

Research further suggests that clients are likely to require support with some aspect of the self-fitting task but an untrained layperson such as the spouse of a hearing aid user may not be a useful source of support and will not improve your chances of successfully self-fitting your hearing device. If you are unfamiliar with how to use a smart phone or have any kind of cognitive impairment, we recommend seeking the advice of a trained and accredited audiologist to ensure the best performance for your hearing device.

Have you researched the authenticity of your self-fitting hearing device?

Self-fitting hearing aids may be a less expensive option, but it is important to be certain that your self-fitting hearing aid is approved as a listed medical device in Australia. The TGA considers the intended purpose or use of a hearing loss product as it is determined by the manufacturer when deciding whether a product should be regulated as a medical device for supply in Australia. Products being sold without any information regarding their status with the TGA may not comply with Australian regulations. The TGA does not regulate hearing aids which are imported by individuals for personal use.

Additionally, if a hearing aid is purchased overseas, you may need to check with the local manufacturer if they will accept the international warranty.

Conclusion

Audiology Australia understands that self-fitting hearing devices may assist some clients with the self-management of their mild to moderate hearing loss and that the use of self-fitting hearing aids may represent convenience and a financial saving.

However, Audiology Australia recommends that anyone seeking to purchase a self-fitting hearing device considers their requirements carefully and ensures that, where they may need support for the fitting and adjustment of their hearing aid, they seek the involvement of a qualified hearing health practitioner. Audiology Australia further encourages clients to take action to ensure that the products they are purchasing are done so through a reputable supplier after they have sought appropriate advice and diagnosis from an accredited audiologist to be certain that a hearing aid is the best support for their individual circumstances.

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