

What to Know When Buying Prescription Hearing Aids

INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS REGARDING PRESCRIPTION HEARING AIDS

Who do I see to buy prescription hearing aids?

In Minnesota, both audiologists and hearing instrument dispensers sell prescription hearing aids. By law, persons under 18 years of age must be evaluated by an audiologist before getting prescription hearing aids.

How do audiologists and hearing instrument dispensers differ?

Both recommend, fit, and sell prescription hearing aids. Audiologists also evaluate and rehabilitate patients with more complicated problems.

Hearing Instrument Dispensers

- Test hearing to assist clients in selecting prescription hearing aids.
- Recommend, fit, and dispense prescription hearing aids.
- Have passed written and practical exams.

Audiologists

- Evaluate hearing, balance, and tinnitus.
- Recommend, fit, and dispense prescription hearing aids and other assistive devices, including implantable devices.
- Perform specialized work unrelated to dispensing.
- Have at least a master's degree and have completed a supervised internship. They have also passed a practical exam.

Do I have to see a medical doctor before I get prescription hearing aids?

Since December 2016, most people over the age of 18 do not need to be evaluated by a medical doctor before obtaining prescription hearing aids. However, if a practitioner finds that you have one of eight conditions, they should refer you to a doctor to determine if the condition is medically or surgically correctable. These conditions include:

- Your ear has a birth defect or an unusual shape. Your ear was injured or deformed in an accident.
- You saw blood, pus, or fluid coming out of your ear in the past 6 months.
- Your ear feels painful or uncomfortable.
- You have a lot of ear wax, or you think something could be in your ear.
- You get really dizzy or have a feeling of spinning or swaying (called vertigo).

- Your hearing changed suddenly in the past 6 months.
- Your hearing changes: it gets worse then gets better again.
- You have worse hearing in one ear.
- You hear ringing or buzzing in only one ear.

Should I buy used prescription hearing aids to save money?

A practitioner may sell used or rebuilt prescription hearing aids. However, the practitioner must tell you the aids are used or rebuilt. Both the container and an attached tag must state that they are used. Buying used prescription hearing aids is not recommended.

How do I learn to use my prescription hearing aids?

Your practitioner must give you a booklet with your hearing aids and must review the booklet with you.

What should I get in writing?

The practitioner must give you:

- A copy of your contract.
- Information about the warranty on the prescription hearing aids you purchase.
- An instruction book for your prescription hearing aids.
- A notice that you may cancel your purchase within 45 days.
- Notice of your right to cancel within 3 days if you purchased from someone who came to your home.
- A copy of the results of your hearing test (your audiogram), upon request.
- All prescription hearing aids must show manufacturer or distributor name, model name or number, serial number, and year of manufacture.

Can I cancel my purchase and get my money back?

You may cancel for any reason. But you must:

- Cancel within 45 days of purchase.
- Put your cancellation in writing. Keep a copy.
- Return the prescription hearing aids. (Mail or return to office.) If the practitioner has your prescription hearing aids any time during the 45 days, you have a longer time to cancel. You have one extra day for each 24-hour period the practitioner has your prescription hearing aids.

You can get all your money back if:

- Your contract does not say there is a “cancellation fee,” **or**
- You bought the prescription hearing aids from someone who came to your home, and you cancel within 3 days.

If your contract includes a “cancellation fee,” the practitioner may keep part of the money. The fee cannot be over \$250. The practitioner must refund your money within 30 days.

I made an “in home” purchase. Do I have any other rights?

If you bought prescription hearing aids from someone who came to your home, they must give you a “notice of cancellation.” This notice tells you about your right to cancel. If you cancel in writing by midnight of the third business day after the sale, you can get all your money back. You can give your cancellation to the practitioner at the address in the contract, or you can mail it to that address. If you mail it, the time that counts is when you put it in the mailbox. The practitioner must refund all your money in ten days, even if the contract states there will be a cancellation fee. If the practitioner did not provide a “notice of cancellation,” you can cancel verbally or in writing.

What if my prescription hearing aids need repairs?

All new prescription hearing aids must have at least a one-year warranty from the manufacturer. If your prescription hearing aid is under a manufacturer’s warranty, the aid will be serviced for any reason, including wear due to normal use. It may also include a “clean and check” service. Your contract will tell you about other warranties you have. Any warranty will be in writing. The practitioner must give you a copy. The warranty must state:

- The name, address, and phone number of the service provider.
- The length of the warranty.
- The prescription hearing aids’ model and serial number.
- The cost of the warranty.
- How much you must pay before the warranty applies.
- All other warranty terms and conditions

What should I do before I buy?

- Shop and compare. Quality, prices, models, guarantees, warranties, and service agreements vary. Many practitioners offer more time to try prescription hearing aids, more time to cancel, and better warranties and refunds than the law requires.
- Choose your practitioner. You don’t have to buy from the person who tested your hearing. Check your insurance. Find out if you have coverage. Also find out if you need a medical evaluation to have coverage.
- Ask if the practitioner sells different brands. Some brands may fit you better than others. Ask about follow-up visits for fitting and adjustment. Find out where to go for adjustments and what they will cost.
- Ask about regular service. Some brands can only be worked on by certain practitioners.
- Ask about telecoils and hearing loops. Telecoils improve sound from telephone receivers and in some public places.

- Negotiate the features of the prescription hearing aids and the service agreement. Decide what features you want.
- Make sure agreements about the sale, service contract, guarantees, warranties, batteries, and optional features are in writing. You can ask for changes in pre-printed contract forms.
- Ask if the practitioner does “real-ear measurement” (REM). REM measures how well the prescription hearing aid works when it is in your ear.
- Decide if you want replacement insurance. Compare rates from your homeowner’s policy.

What about after I buy?

- **Plan to go in for follow-up.** Make sure your prescription hearing aids work as well as possible. Work with your practitioner to achieve a good fit and the best sound quality possible. Time spent when you first get prescription hearing aids will pay off later.
- **Expect an adjustment period.** Prescription hearing aids will improve your hearing, but your hearing will be different than before you needed prescription hearing aids. Try your prescription hearing aids in different settings. Use your trial period to learn how your prescription hearing aids work in different situations: quiet places, talking on the phone, watching television, in large groups, in crowds. This will help you know what you can expect from your prescription hearing aids and will help you know if you want adjustments.
- **Take care of problems during the 45-day trial period.** The trial period is your time to decide if the prescription hearing aids are right for you. Use it. Your practitioner should schedule check-ups during this period. If you have problems with your fitting or cannot get in within 45-days, request that the 45 days be extended.
- **Get it in writing.** If your practitioner doesn’t give adequate service or help with fitting problems, return your prescription hearing aids right away. Don’t wait for the end of the trial period.
- **Keep your prescription hearing aids clean and dry.** Ear wax and moisture, even sweat or just dampness, can damage your prescription hearing aids. Follow the directions to take care of your prescription hearing aids.
- **Keep your old prescription hearing aids as a backup.** If you don’t understand your contract, call your practitioner. If you have been working with your dispenser or audiologist and they have not addressed your question, concern, or complaint, contact the Minnesota Department of Health calling 651-201-4200 or toll free: 800-657-3837 or emailing at health.hid@state.mn.us.

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