

# Hidden Hearing

*Your hearing is our expertise*



A guide to  
buying hearing aids

# Getting the best value for money

Getting value for money is about more than just the costs - it's about exceptional service and lifetime aftercare. An audiologist who offers you great follow-up may be the difference between your hearing aids sitting in a drawer or giving you a new lease of life.

It's difficult to define what constitutes basic, mid and top-range hearing aid prices. Some people would say that the more channels or bands your aid has, the better it is. But this isn't always the case, as it's all about your personal hearing needs, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution.

## *The price of hearing aids - what are you paying for?*

The supply of hearing aids involves more than just the instruments themselves. You need to know what is involved and then check exactly what is covered by the price quoted. The individual elements may include:

- **Initial hearing consultation/test:** This test identifies what you can hear and, of course, what you cannot. A comprehensive test will include an otoscopy, where the audiologist will inspect the ear canal and an audiometry (the beep test) to test your hearing at different frequencies. Your hearing care professional will also discuss your lifestyle to understand your hearing loss and the improvements needed.

- **Hearing instruments:** Digital technology has revolutionised the quality of the sound you hear and hearing aids can now be worn in the ear or just behind the ear.

- **Aftercare appointments:** The successful use of hearing aids is dependent on the commitment of the user and the quality of support provided by the hearing care professional. Best practice includes a programme of aftercare to ensure you enjoy the full benefits from the new hearing aids. You should check that future appointments are covered by the initial price you pay, as this is not always the case.

- **Batteries:** All modern aids are powered by tiny batteries. How long a battery lasts depends on the amount of time it is used but the average life of a battery is around 5 days. You normally have to buy batteries, but it is possible that the price of your hearing aids includes batteries. Newer aids may be rechargeable, ask about these models also.

- **Guarantee:** All aids carry a manufacturer's guarantee but the period of that cover can vary. Sometimes you will find your hearing aids can be guaranteed for 2, 3 or even 4 years. It is advisable to check this before you buy.

*To compare between suppliers' prices, you will need to check which of these are included or excluded.*

## *How do you compare?*



Which hearing aids are suitable for an individual will be determined firstly by their hearing loss (as reported by the results of a hearing test); this identifies the level of amplification required. Secondly, by their lifestyle, which indicates the situations in which they need to be able to hear; this identifies the 'features' that are required, e.g. Bluetooth connectivity.

In some ways, hearing aids are like cars – some cost more than others! Let's take a BMW 1 Series and compare it with the Ford Fiesta. The cars are

of similar size and both will accommodate four people but the BMW is more expensive. This may be because of build quality which suggests better reliability. The BMW may have more/better features. Perhaps the BMW has better and more comfortable seats. For some people, that could be described as a cosmetic luxury. But for someone doing many miles each year, the better seats would be viewed as a necessity. Knowing your own needs, you may place more value on some features than others.

In the same way, hearing aids come from a number of different manufacturers producing a range of models, each of which has a variety of features. Each model will be designed to help a particular range of hearing loss; also models will have additional features which may or may not be useful or suitable for a particular user.

After your consultation, your hearing care professional should present a number of suitable options offering a range of prices. You may then ask about the particular features of each recommendation and decide which are of benefit to you. An informed choice may then be made.

### ***Should I have 1 or 2?***

It is an accepted fact that nearly everyone with hearing loss is best advised to have a hearing aid for both ears. There are exceptions but these are few. Often, our ability to hear tends to fail at the same rate in both ears (this is made clear by the hearing test). Two hearing aids are recommended. For example, our ability to identify where a sound is coming from (localisation) depends upon hearing in both ears. Just having an aid in the right ear will tell the brain that all sounds are coming from the right; this could be at best simply irritating or at worst life-threatening (an approaching vehicle). With two hearing aids, the level of amplification necessary in each is less; this makes listening far more comfortable and relaxing.

The final argument is usually to point out that we don't see many people coming out of the opticians with a monocle!

### ***What if you are not happy?***

You need to know what will happen if you are not satisfied. Will you get a full refund or is there a cancellation fee? If you go ahead and buy hearing aids, you must check whether you have a period to assess the benefit of your purchase. This does vary from supplier to supplier and can range from zero to as long as 90 days.

A period of adaptation is necessary as most people need some time to get used to using the aids before they can tell if they provide the help required. Before the hearing test you should be asked to describe the situations that are made difficult by your hearing loss. After buying your aids you must then check whether they provide the necessary help in those same situations.



### ***What guarantee is there?***

With the arrival of digital technology, modern hearing aids are far more reliable than they used to be. Nevertheless, a comprehensive, lengthy guarantee can be very reassuring.

At one time, a 12-month guarantee was standard. But now you will find that guarantees range from 12 months to as long as 4 years.

You will want to know what is covered. You can expect you will not be covered if you damage or lose the aids but any fault or breakdown will be.

### ***All risks cover***

Your household insurance may extend to your hearing aids. Check this with your insurers as soon as possible. If your policy does not extend to hearing aids, you should ask whether your hearing aid supplier has a scheme offering all risks protection; this would cover damage done to the aids or their loss.



## 5 questions to ask:

1. Does the hearing aid price include batteries?
2. What if I am not happy? Do I get a full refund?
3. How long is the guarantee?
4. What aftercare service is included?
5. Do I need an aid for each ear?

## Buying a hearing aid: key considerations

**Have you been offered a choice** of brand and type of hearing aid? Have you reviewed the pros and cons of different hearing aid types, and are any features (such as Bluetooth, remote control, telecoil, additional programmes and volume control) worth the extra you'll be paying?

**Check the trial period** with money-back guarantee (you should expect at least 28 days, and it could be as much as 90). Are you charged a cancellation fee (it can be as high as 12.5%) if you return the aids within the trial period?

**Is there a warranty period** and what does it cover? For example, replacing a lost aid or repairing it, and replacing non-functioning ones?

**Servicing, maintenance and parts** (such as batteries and wax filters) - has the audiologist explained what is required and indicated the ongoing costs? Will there be a cost for follow-up?

**Who will follow-up appointments be with** and how often? How do you get hold of the audiologist if there is a problem and how quickly should you expect a problem to be rectified?

**If you're taking out a finance agreement**, are you clear about the details and annual percentage rate (APR) charged?

**Have you seen the written agreement** before paying anything and had terms and conditions been clearly explained to you? Remember to check the small print and read everything before signing.

**Do you know how to make a complaint** if you're not satisfied with the service you receive and how to take the complaint further if you need to?

Discuss your options with our hearing healthcare team or arrange a **FREE hearing test** by calling 0800 145 6067 or visit [hiddenhearing.org](https://www.hiddenhearing.org)

