

The Four Most Common Pitfalls of Buying Hearing Aids

1. Hearing aids as a product versus a process

The selection and fitting of appropriate hearing instruments are only one part of a larger whole that allows you to effectively communicate with your loved ones and the wider world. Our Doctors of Audiology are uniquely qualified to guide you through this process. We offer therapies to optimize your listening abilities, provide effective communication strategies for you and your family, consider additional assistive listening devices such as amplified phones, and ensure the proper operation and performance of your hearing instruments through routine maintenance visits.

Realize that you are shopping for a hearing health care professional, not a particular product. "A hearing aid is only as good as the professional who evaluates the patient, chooses the best technology, fits the hearing aid and, perhaps most importantly, offers training and follow-up," says the president of the American Academy of Audiology. At Northgate Hearing Services, our Doctors of Audiology each have an average of 27 years experience in improving our patient's lives through better hearing. ***As a result, 95% of our patients are satisfied with their hearing healthcare compared to 54% nationally.***

2. Price as Priority

We know your mailboxes and newspapers are full of hearing aid advertisements touting low prices. It's important to recognize that when you choose a hearing healthcare provider you are not only paying for hearing aids, you are paying for your provider's abilities. Can you imagine shopping for the cheapest braces for your children rather than the most qualified and experienced orthodontist to install and manage them?

You will be satisfied **not** when you pay the lowest price but when you get the best value for your investment. Statistics show that those who purchase inexpensive hearing aids replace them with more appropriate and effective devices within two years, while those who initially invest in quality hearing aids replace them every five years. The most expensive hearing aids you ever buy are the ones that end up in your bedside table drawer!

3. The free hearing test

Many offices offer “free hearing tests”. These constitute the bare minimum required by state law to fit hearing instruments but forego essential components that are critical to making the best hearing healthcare decisions. ***Our comprehensive communication assessment includes “real life” hearing tests*** including how you hear conversation in background noise, how you hear soft or distant voices, and how loud is uncomfortably loud.

Furthermore, free hearing tests are intended solely as a measure of hearing aid candidacy and fail to test for many conditions that require medical attention. Our doctors of audiology are uniquely qualified to identify the need for medical intervention and refer you accordingly.

4. Internet Hearing Aids

As you have gathered by now, effective hearing healthcare involves a comprehensive rehabilitation plan specific to each individual. ***Professional services cannot be dismissed.*** If eliminating them was a feasible method of delivering hearing aids there would be no need for the myriad regulations and well-defined protocols that were put in place to protect the consumer. As the Washington State Hearing Aid Dispensing Code says,

“It is unlawful to fit or dispense a hearing instrument to a resident of this state if the attempted sale or purchase is offered or made by telephone or mail order and there is no face-to-face contact to test or otherwise determine the needs of the prospective purchaser”.

According to *Healthy Hearing*, a consumer education website, purchasing hearing aids over the internet includes the following risks:

- A. Complete circumvention of state and federal laws and professional codes of ethics (all of which were designed to protect the consumer). When consumers acquire hearing aids through non-traditional sources, many state and federal laws are broken, and after participating in these practices, the consumer has few (if any) options to receive satisfaction in the event of dissatisfaction or injury.

- B. Substandard cost/benefit ratio relative to fit, technology and personal attention. To paraphrase, "The joy of a low price is quickly dashed through the ongoing disdain of poor quality and a lack of services!"

- C. Total absence of professional guidance, cautions, diagnosis, referral system, auditory rehabilitation programs, and ongoing professional care. Simply stated, some hearing problems are indeed medically treatable, and some hearing losses are an early presentation of serious medical conditions which need medical attention (more on this later). Audiologists are trained and licensed to know what to look for and to maximize the opportunity for consumer/patient safety. These professionals look for specific test results (types and degrees of hearing loss), visible findings (from the otoscopic ear examination, such as ear wax, perforated ear drums, debris in the ear, infection etc., historical indicators (personal and family history, medicines, noise induced hearing loss, arthritis, head injuries) and other issues, to determine the most appropriate path for the consumer/patient. Hearing aids are wonderful, amazing and useful tools but if applied incorrectly or inappropriately, the consumer/patient can potentially be placed at an additional disadvantage, and even in danger.

Ironically, when individuals purchase hearing aids via the internet and then contract with a hearing healthcare provider for that “face to face” care, they find that savings are negligible versus going through that provider in the first place.

A FINAL WORD...

There is truth to the saying “there’s no such thing as a free lunch. With hearing healthcare, you really do get what you pay for. But when you think about it, aren’t the joy of hearing your children and grandchildren , the fun of catching a good joke, and experiencing less stress knowing that you are hearing the best that you possibly can worth every penny?