

Audiology

What to Expect: Your Hearing Aid Journey



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Support for you at every step of your hearing journey

Thank you for trusting Northwestern Medicine to help you with your hearing journey. Here, you will be at the center of your care team and decisions.

Our goal is to provide personalized and comprehensive care. Hearing aids can change your life. This guide will help you learn about hearing aids and what to expect if you decide to use them.



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About hearing aids

How hearing aids work

A hearing aid is a small electronic device that either sits behind or in the ear. It helps people with hearing loss hear more clearly. A hearing aid picks up sounds through a microphone, processes them and makes them louder before sending them to the ear.

Hearing aids can also help people with tinnitus (ringing in the ears), which is a common symptom of hearing loss. They can help quiet the ringing.

Types of hearing aids

There are 2 styles of hearing aids:

- › **Behind-the-ear:** This style has 1 piece that fits behind the ear and a 2nd piece attached to a wire that goes into your ear canal.
- › **In-the-ear:** This style is made to fit the shape of your ear. The entire hearing aid is 1 piece that sits in the ear.



The right style for you depends on your hearing test results, how comfortable you are using it and your personal goals.

Not all hearing aids are the same. Prescription hearing aids are customized to your hearing test results. Your audiologist (hearing specialist) can fine-tune the device to meet your specific needs.

Over-the-counter hearing aids, in general, are not programmed based on your results and cannot be fine-tuned in the same way.

What to expect

A hearing aid is a tool to help you hear better. They do not make hearing loss go away. You can expect the following:

- › Hearing aids will not cancel out noise completely.
- › Distance matters. The closer you are to the sound source, the better you will hear.
- › Your voice may sound different at first. This is your brain getting used to hearing it more fully again.
- › You may hear sounds that you have not heard in a long time. These can include your car's turn signal, your refrigerator running, birds chirping and microwave beeps.

Tips for success

If you decide to get hearing aids, they will be an adjustment for you. These tips can help make you more comfortable and set you up for success:

- › Be patient with yourself. Give yourself time to get used to them.
- › Wear your hearing aids the whole time you are awake — even when you are in quiet areas. This helps train your brain for noisy situations.
- › Rest and take breaks as needed.
- › Talk with your audiologist if you are having trouble with your hearing aids. They can help you find a solution.

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Visits for hearing aids: what to expect

We offer a special audiologic program for people with hearing loss and tinnitus. Here are the 4 appointments you will need to get your prescription hearing aids:

- 1 Hearing evaluation
- 2 Consultation for the device
- 3 Device fitting
- 4 Follow-up verification

Over-the-counter hearing aids do not require these visits or a prescription. However, insurance plans typically do not cover over-the-counter hearing aids.

Some insurance companies cover hearing aids, others may not. Please call the number on the back of your insurance card and ask about your specific benefits.

Hearing evaluation

An audiologist with a doctorate degree in audiology (AuD) will evaluate you. In some cases, a Northwestern University audiology doctoral student may perform the evaluation under the audiologist's supervision.

The hearing evaluation will show the type and degree of hearing loss you have. The audiologist and/or the physician will explain the results in detail.

The Illinois Department of Public Health **requires** that you have a hearing evaluation within 6 months of buying any prescription hearing device. Usually, the audiologist bills your insurance for this evaluation.

Medical clearance for hearing aids

If you want a prescription hearing aid, please bring medical clearance from a licensed doctor (preferably one who specializes in ear care) to

your evaluation visit. This clearance confirms it's safe for you to use a hearing aid. If you do not have or bring medical clearance, you must sign a medical waiver if you buy a hearing device.

Consultation for the device

You will have a 1-hour appointment to review all the hearing aid options available to you. The audiologist will answer any questions you may have.

During the consultation, the audiologist will talk with you about the following:

- › Styles of hearing aids
- › Different hearing aid manufacturers
- › Colors
- › Features such as rechargeability and connectivity
- › Pricing

The audiologist will recommend the style of device that best meets your needs. If you decide to buy a device, it will take about 2 weeks to receive it.

There is a fee for this appointment. Our staff will let you know the amount when you schedule. Before your consultation, please contact your insurance plan to learn what they cover.



Device fitting

At this appointment, you will receive your selected hearing device. The audiologist will fit it for you and:

- › Program the device according to your hearing evaluation results.
- › Talk to you about how to use and care for your device.
- › Help you practice putting it in and taking it out.

The audiologist will also talk with you about the trial period, warranty and contract of your device.

If your insurance covers hearing aids, we may bill them for the cost of your devices. If your insurance plan does not cover them, you must pay the full cost of the device before you leave the device-fitting visit. We accept cash, credit or debit cards and checks.

Follow-up verification

You will have a trial period for your hearing aids. It lasts 30 business days from when you get the hearing aids.

Depending on your needs, you will have one or more follow-up appointments during the trial period to make sure your hearing device fits well and works properly. You can talk with your audiologist about any concerns about:

- › Sound quality
- › Volume
- › Background noise
- › Comfort

There is no charge for these appointments during the trial period.

All hearing devices have a 3-year manufacturer's warranty and a 30-business-day trial period, which begins on the date of purchase. If you return the device within 30 business days of when you buy it, you will get a refund for the device. **However, we do not refund costs for custom earpieces, fitting fees and dispensing fees.**

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The patient journey

Below is the typical care journey for someone receiving a hearing aid.



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Hearing aid options

Hearing aids come with different levels of technology. Generally, the more advanced the technology, the higher the cost.

Hearing aid levels

The right hearing aid level for you depends on your listening needs, lifestyle and daily environments. All hearing aids are designed to help you hear clearly in certain situations.

Value level – quiet communication lifestyle

Best for: Quiet settings, such as 1-on-1 conversations at home and watching TV

Basic level – casual communication lifestyle

Best for: Settings with minimal background noise, such as small group gatherings and quiet restaurants

Advanced level – active communication lifestyle

Best for: Various environments with moderate background noise, such as restaurants, religious services and medium-sized group gatherings

Premium level – dynamic communication lifestyle

Best for: Challenging listening situations, including busy social settings like parties, bars, event centers and sporting arenas

In summary, as you go up in the level of technology in hearing aids, you get:

- › More processing channels
- › More precise microphones
- › More precise sound “groups” (how the hearing aid sorts different sounds)
- › More noise reduction
- › Faster sound processing

Your audiologist will work with you to decide what hearing aid is best for you.

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Frequently asked questions

If you have any other questions, please ask your care team.

Will a hearing aid make my hearing worse?

No, hearing aids do not cause more hearing loss. They have internal “stops” that keep the sound from getting too loud and causing damage.

Can I connect my hearing aid to my phone?

Most hearing aids can connect to smartphones via Bluetooth. Many also have applications (apps) that let you control the hearing aid volume and other settings.

How long do hearing aids last?

On average, 5 to 7 years. However, this depends on how well you take care of your hearing aids.

Is there a warranty?

Yes. All hearing aids have a 3-year warranty that covers unlimited repairs. If you lose a hearing aid, you will have to pay for a replacement.

Can I return my hearing aids?

Yes. You will have 30 business days from the day you buy your device to decide if you like the hearing aids. During this time, you can return the device for a refund, or exchange them for a different color or style. Your audiologist will work with you to make sure you are happy with your choices.

Do hearing aids prevent dementia?

Hearing aids do not directly prevent dementia. However, studies have shown that they can lower the risk by reducing social isolation.

Will my hearing aids make me tired?

No. Research has shown that hearing aids reduce listening fatigue. Your brain does not have to work as hard to understand a conversation when you can hear more clearly.

Do I need a cochlear implant?

Cochlear implants are surgically implanted devices for people with severe or profound hearing loss. Your audiologist will discuss this option if it is appropriate for you.

Resources to help you learn more

For more information about hearing aids, you can visit the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association \(ASHA\) website](#) or view these online ASHA resources:

- › [Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids – Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- › [Tips for Improving Conversation in Noisy Environments](#)
- › [Hearing Aids for Adults](#)

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Locations and contact information

Downtown

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Galter Pavilion

675 North St. Clair Street, Suite 15-200

Chicago, Illinois 60611

312.695.4923



TTY for all locations: 711

North Suburbs

Northwestern Medicine Evanston Sherman Avenue

1630 Sherman Avenue, Suite 100

Evanston, Illinois 60201

847.535.6464

Northwestern Medicine Catherine Gratz Griffin Lake Forest Hospital

800 North Westmoreland Road, Suite 102

Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

847.535.6464

Northwestern Medicine Grayslake Outpatient Center

1475 East Belvidere Road, Suite 201

Grayslake, Illinois 60030

847.535.6464

Northwestern Medicine Glenview Outpatient Center

2701 Patriot Boulevard, Second Floor

Glenview, Illinois 60026

847.535.6464

West Suburbs

Northwestern Medicine Delnor Hospital

302 Randall Road, Suite 202
Geneva, Illinois 60134
630.938.3900

Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital

25 North Winfield Road, Suite 505
Winfield, Illinois 60190
630.938.6161

Northwestern Medicine Naperville

636 Raymond Drive, Suite 204
Naperville, Illinois 60563
331.732.4700

DeKalb County

Northwestern Medicine Sycamore

2127 Midlands Court, Suite 203
Sycamore, Illinois 60178
815.758.8106

TTY for all locations: 711

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital**

Galter Pavilion
675 North St. Clair Street, Suite 15-200
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312.695.4923

Northwestern Medicine Evanston Sherman Avenue

1630 Sherman Avenue, Suite 100
Evanston, Illinois 60201
847.535.6464

**Northwestern Medicine Catherine Gratz Griffin
Lake Forest Hospital**

800 North Westmoreland Road, Suite 102
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045
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Northwestern Medicine Grayslake Outpatient Center

1475 East Belvidere Road, Suite 201
Grayslake, Illinois 60030
847.535.6464

Northwestern Medicine Glenview Outpatient Center

2701 Patriot Boulevard, Second Floor
Glenview, Illinois 60026
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Northwestern Medicine Delnor Hospital

302 Randall Road, Suite 202
Geneva, Illinois 60134
630.938.3900

Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital

25 North Winfield Road, Suite 505
Winfield, Illinois 60190
630.938.6161

Northwestern Medicine Naperville

636 Raymond Drive, Suite 204
Naperville, Illinois 60563
331.732.4700

Northwestern Medicine Sycamore

2127 Midlands Court, Suite 203
Sycamore, Illinois 60178
815.758.8106

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