

Questions to ask your audiologist

Part of the *Healthy Conversations in Hearing Wellness* series
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GOOD for you! You've finally decided to make an appointment to get your hearing checked. Choosing an audiologist can be daunting, but our Audiologist Interview Guide makes it easier. Remember, the audiologist works for you. They should be knowledgeable, caring, reputable, and a good fit for your hearing needs.

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Before going...

Get a referral

Your “interview” process actually begins before making your first appointment. You can also ask friends and family for referrals. Nothing beats “word of mouth” referrals—even for audiologists. In our digital age, you can ask friends and family by simply posting

on Facebook or sending a quick group text. You may also want to get a referral from your family physician.

Check their reputation

As you discover candidates, be sure to look online for patient reviews about the audiologist and their practice. Independent reviews are often found on Google and Facebook. If you can't find any reviews or referrals, or if the reviews are less than stellar, then you will need to keep looking.

Check safety protocols

Due to health crises, you may feel apprehensive about visiting an unfamiliar office. Most audiology offices now have strict protocols in place to create the safest experience for you. Look for information on their website or call to ask how they safeguard the health of their staff and clients. If you have specific concerns, express them directly and keep asking questions until you have the information you need. The more you know, the more comfortable you will feel.

At the “interview” ask...

How long have you been in business?

It may seem simple, but longevity means something. If an audiologist or hearing clinic has been in business for 10, 20, or 30 years,

they've done so by being accountable to their community, providing excellent service to regular patients over many years.

What types of services do you provide or specialize in?

Many clinics have both audiologists and hearing instrument specialists to help evaluate your hearing and make recommendations. Audiologists have advanced degrees and their practice areas may include any aspect of hearing health or hearing loss. A hearing instrument specialist is more focused on hearing aid selection, fitting, and testing. Some hearing professionals specialize in a practice area, for example pediatrics, hearing and balance, or cochlear implants.

What types and brands of hearing aids do you work with?

Audiologists and hearing aid specialists are committed to helping people regain their hearing. They know there are options that can be tailored to your individual needs. If you suspect the person or practice you're visiting only cares about selling you a product or a particular brand, perhaps it's better to look for a different care provider.

Is your hearing assessment free or covered by insurance?

Many audiology practices offer hearing tests for free. Hearing aids are not typically covered by insurance, but a hearing health assessment often is. Check with your insurance company and audiologist to make sure you're getting the best benefit.

How will you assess my hearing and make recommendations?

With this question, you're looking for depth and detail. A good audiologist will take time to understand your specific situation and what makes you unique. They'll also perform diagnostic tests.



The American Academy of Audiology established “best practice” guidelines for audiologists, with key services to look for in a good audiologist:

- **A hearing history assessment.** This means the audiologist take the time to review your past and conditions that may have influenced your hearing loss. Not all types of hearing loss are created equal, therefore this step is critical.
- **Otosopic inspection.** The audiologist will use a simple scope to examine your ear canal and eardrum. It’s worth noting some audiologists can help with cerumen—or earwax—management. In some cases, excessive earwax causes discomfort and hearing loss, and removing it can restore some hearing levels. Not all audiologists offer this service, but it may save time to find one who does.
- **Hearing loss diagnosis.** The diagnosis should include a tympanometry test,

where the audiologist checks for fluid in the middle ear, makes sure the eardrum moves normally, and there is normal pressure in the middle ear. The diagnosis should also cover any physical or medical issues that could contribute to hearing loss. In some cases, the audiologist may refer you to a physician for follow up.

- **Measure of loudness discomfort levels.** This part of the process is not fun, but it is necessary, as it helps the audiologist understand what initial settings should be used for a hearing aid. The audiologist plays a series of tones and beeps (some of them quite loud) to assess your loudness discomfort levels. This measure helps the audiologist identify the proper settings for your hearing aids.
- **Needs assessment.** In addition to the hearing history assessment, the audiologist learns about your hearing goals, your financial budget, and other



lifestyle factors in order to identify the optimal hearing aid solution.

- **Vision and dexterity assessment.** Poor eyesight or troubles with fine motor skills or arthritis should not stand in the way of good hearing. Hearing aids come in a variety of types and sizes, and each with its own set of features and benefits to suit all kinds of needs and preferences. That's another reason why it's so important that your audiologist has a wide range of experience with many brands and is knowledgeable of new technologies.
- **Counseling.** This is a critical step in the process. Your audiologist counsels you and your family on hearing loss, hearing aids, what to expect from the journey, and how to get the most out of the experience. Don't forget to have a friend or family member with you if possible. There is a lot of information to absorb, so it's helpful to have another person to listen and learn alongside you.

Do you offer hearing aid repairs?

This one is easy to miss, but if the office doesn't offer repairs or help you arrange for one with the hearing aid manufacturer, then you'll have to go somewhere else for help. Make sure your audiologist offers complete care, even after you get your hearing aids and for as long as you wear them.

Do you offer flexible payment plans?

Good audiologists understand hearing aids are a significant investment. They'll typically offer flexible payment plans to help you get the best hearing aid and ongoing care that fits your budget and lifestyle. Be sure you understand the payment terms, including your monthly payment amount, how long you will need to make payments, and any policy for repairs, exchanges, or refunds.

And finally...

Trust your instincts

There's a good reason we listen to the little voice that tells us if we're heading in the right direction. It often alerts us to things we may have noticed, but haven't fully thought about. After your first visit with your audiologist, do a quick "gut check" by asking yourself the following questions:

- Did the audiologist take the time to listen to my concerns and answer all my questions?
- Did I feel rushed during the appointment?
- Did they seem professional, friendly and considerate?
- Did they explain things in a way I understand?
- Do they seem easy to work with?
- Do I trust them?
- Most importantly, how did the audiologist make me feel?

Asking the right questions—of yourself and your audiologist—will keep you informed and give you the confidence to hear well and be well. 

Make sure your audiologist offers complete care, even after you get your hearing aids and for as long as you wear them.