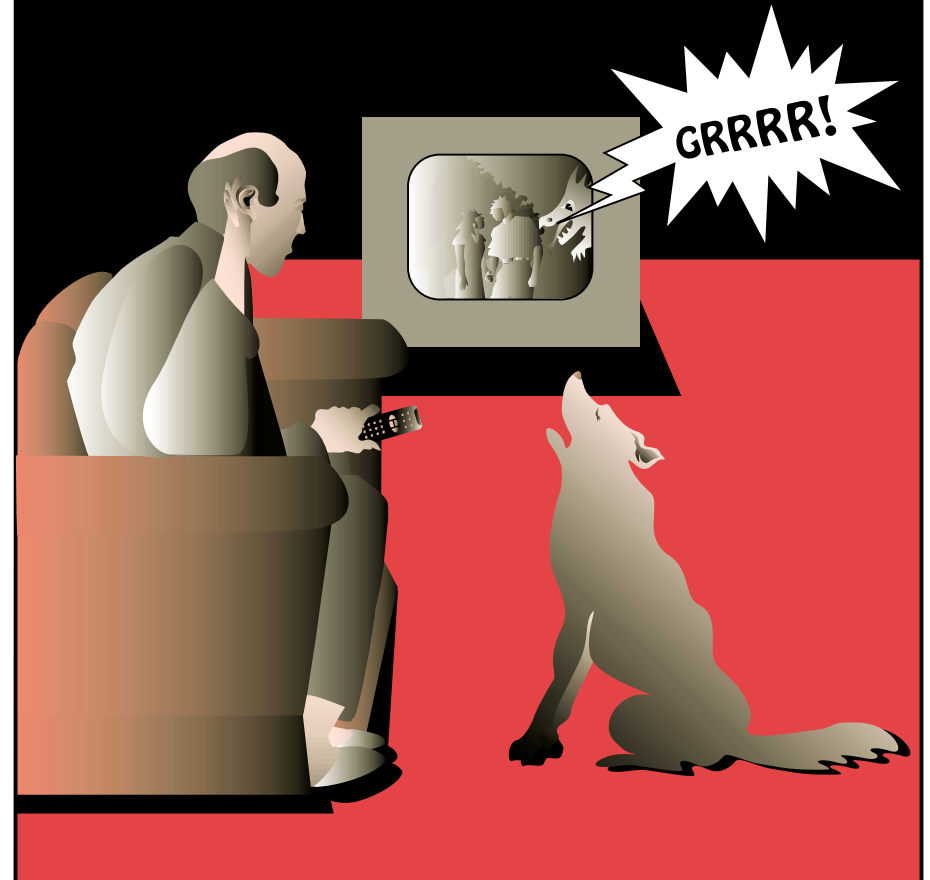


Straight Talk from FDA About Hearing Loss and Hearing Aids



Department of Health and Human Services
Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane, (HFI-40)
Rockville, MD 20857

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(FDA) 01-4270

FDA U.S. Food and Drug Administration

The Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, is part of the U.S. government. One of FDA's jobs is to tell Americans what to do about hearing loss.

Do You Have Trouble Hearing?

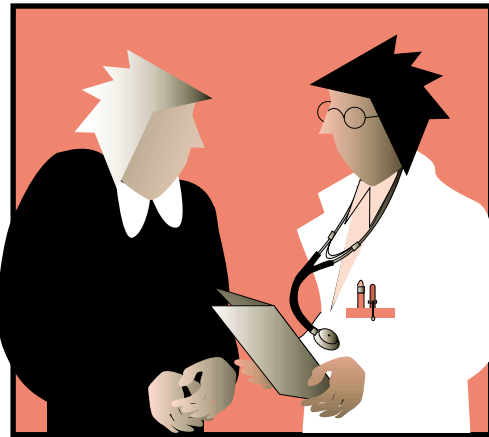
If you have trouble hearing, you're not alone. More than 25 million Americans have hearing loss, including one out of four people older than 65. Hearing loss may come from infections, strokes, head injuries, some medicines, tumors, other medical

problems, or even too much ear wax. It can also result from repeated exposure to very loud noise, such as music, power tools, or jet engines. Changes in the way the ear works as a person ages can also affect hearing.



For Most People, There Is Help

The good news is that, for most people who have a hearing loss, there are ways to fix the problem. So if you have trouble hearing, visit your doctor or hearing health-care professional to find out if you have a hearing loss and, if so, how to treat it. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has rules to make sure that treatments for



hearing loss—
medicines, hearing
aids, and other
medical devices—are
safe and really work.

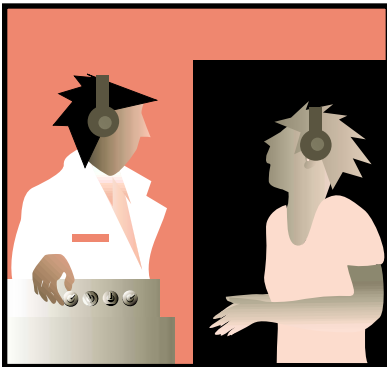
You *Might* Need A Hearing Aid If:

- people say you're shouting when you talk to them
- you need the TV or radio turned up louder than other people do
- you often have to ask people to repeat what they say because you can't quite hear them, especially in groups or when there is background noise
- you can't hear a noise if you're not facing the direction it's coming from
- you seem to hear better out of one ear than the other
- you have to strain to hear
- you keep hearing a hissing or ringing background noise
- you can't hear a dripping faucet or the high notes of a violin.

If you have any of these symptoms, see your doctor or hearing health-care professional so you can be tested for hearing loss.

Hearing Tests and Treatments

To find out what kind of hearing loss you have and whether all the parts of your ear are working OK, your doctor may want you to take a hearing test. These tests are often given by a health-care professional that specializes in hearing, such as an audiologist. Audiologists are usually not medical



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doctors but are trained to give hearing tests and interpret the results. Hearing tests are painless.

If the hearing test shows that you have a hearing loss, there may be one or more ways to treat it. Possible treatments include medication, surgery or a hearing aid.

Hearing aids can usually help hearing loss that involves damage to the inner ear. This type of hearing loss is common in older people as part of the aging process. But younger people can also have it from infections or repeated exposure to loud noises.

Hearing Aids and Cell Phones

Cell phones and hearing aids don't work very well together, so you may not be able to use a cell phone while you're wearing a hearing aid. This is because electromagnetic interference between the phone and the hearing aid causes buzzing or static. Scientists are trying to find out more about this problem and what can be done about it.



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Types of Hearing Aids

All hearing aids have these parts:

- a microphone, to pick up sound
- an amplifier, to make sound louder
- a speaker, to bring sound to the ear
- a battery.

Some people only need a hearing aid for one ear. Other people need one for each ear. If you need a hearing aid, your doctor will know whether you need one or two.

Here are some of the most common types of hearing aids:

○ **Behind-the-Ear:** This kind of hearing aid fits behind the ear and carries sound to the ear through a custom ear mold. Hearing aids that are attached to eyeglasses are a type of behind-the-ear hearing aid. They are useful for mild to severe hearing loss.

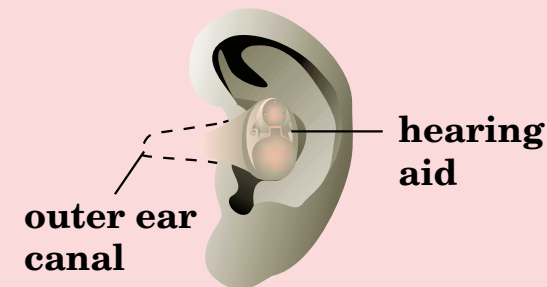
Behind-the-Ear



○ **In-the-Ear:** These are custom-made to fit in the outer ear. You can't see any wires because they are inside the aid. They are useful for mild to moderate hearing loss.

○ **In-the-Ear-Canal:** This kind of hearing aid is custom-made to fit in the ear canal. There are no outside wires or tubes. These hearing aids are

In-the-Ear-Canal



almost impossible to see. They help people with all but the worst hearing loss.

○ **On-the-Body:** These are for very bad hearing loss. They include a case with a larger microphone, amplifier and battery. The case can be carried in pockets or attached to clothing. The case is connected by a wire to an ear receiver that is attached to an ear mold.

Cochlear Implants

You may have heard about a device to help hearing that is implanted behind the ear during surgery. This device is called a cochlear (pronounced COKE-lee-ur) implant. It is only used for very bad hearing loss. It gets its name from the medical term for the inner ear—the cochlea. A cochlear implant doesn't completely restore hearing but it helps a person hear sounds and conversations better. The device has several parts:

- An electronic device placed in the bone of the skull, behind the outer ear.
- Wires and electrodes inserted into the inner ear, or cochlea.
- A microphone and transmitter that are worn outside the body.

If your hearing is very bad, your doctor could decide if a cochlear implant could help you.

Have Your Hearing Tested

Not everyone with a hearing problem can be helped by a hearing aid. Your doctor or hearing health-care professional is the best person to know if a hearing aid might help you.

You should have your hearing tested by a specialist before you buy a hearing aid. It's best to get your hearing test from a licensed hearing

health professional. If the hearing test shows that you need a hearing aid, you will get a note or prescription saying your hearing has been tested and you need a hearing aid. The note may also say what kind of hearing aid the hearing health-care professional recommends.



Buyer Beware

You may see ads that say that you can buy a hearing aid without being examined. This is true—it's up to you. But if you decide you don't want a medical exam to rule out a medical reason for the hearing loss, you will have to sign a written statement called a waiver. The waiver says that the company or

person selling the hearing aid has told you that FDA has determined that it is in your best health interest to have a medical

examination by a licensed physician—preferably one that specializes in ear diseases—before buying a hearing aid, but that you decided not to have the medical exam.

Ads may also offer money-back guarantees if you're not satisfied with the hearing aid. Make sure you read and understand what the



seller is promising. The best place to buy a hearing aid is from a licensed hearing aid dispenser, or seller.

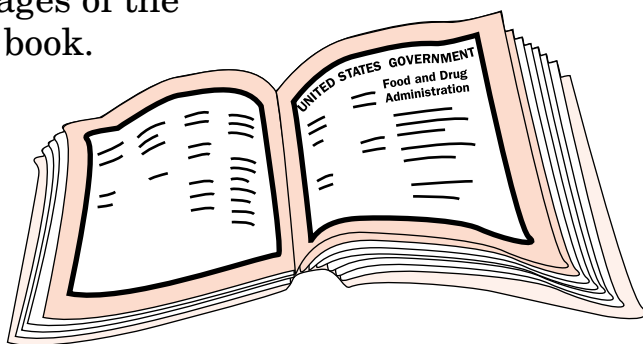
To find out if the seller is licensed, call or write your local Better Business Bureau, or your state's attorney general.

For More Information

- American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery
(703) 836-4444
<http://www.entnet.org>
- American Speech-Language Hearing Association, Action Center
1-800-638-8255
<http://www.asha.org/consumers/consumers.htm>
- Better Hearing Institute
Hearing HelpLine
1-800-EAR-WELL (1-800-327-9355)
<http://www.betterhearing.org>
- International Hearing Society
Hearing Aid HelpLine
1-800-521-5247

Do You Have Other Questions About Hearing Loss?

FDA may have an office near you. Look for their number in the blue pages of the phone book.



You can also contact FDA through its toll-free number, 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332). Or, on the World Wide Web at *www.fda.gov*.