

---

# The Handy Guide

---

The things you NEED  
to know before you  
purchase hearing  
aids.

---

Paul Minikin

---

## **The Handy Guide – the things you NEED to know before you purchase hearing aids**

It's a daunting prospect, you've been feeling for a while now your hearing isn't what is used to be. Those around you have been telling you for an age to get your hearing checked.

For a year or two you may well have ignored what others have been saying about your hearing, blaming others for mumbling, blaming your lack of attention, the fact that people don't speak like they used to, the list goes on.

After a while it's started to dawn on you that maybe the issue just *might* be down to your own hearing levels dropping but that's your own private thoughts, it maybe takes another year or two before you start to admit to those around you that you *are* suffering from a degree of hearing loss. Typically a few years after that you make the decision that enough is enough, time to take action and address this annoying problem of hearing loss that is becoming more of a nuisance as the years go by.

Congratulations – you've reached a milestone and you've got to the point where nuisance value has overcome reluctance to wear hearing aids, however another obstacle appears, who do you talk to and ask advice from to fix your problem of hearing loss?

### **Questions that may pop up in your mind.**

What about cosmetics? Aren't all hearing aids big beige bananas that sit on the back of the ear? Actually, no. (Well yes they can be, NHS issue hearing aids tend to be beige and almost exclusively sit on the back of the ear and look like the hearing aid to the right, but privately bought hearing aids are usually far neater and more discreet).



What about prices? You may have heard tales of huge price tags for private hearing aids, believe it or not there are some national suppliers of hearing aids in the UK that charge £7000-£8000 for the highest performing technology where exactly the same hearing aids from exactly the same manufacturers are available for £3000-£3200 from suppliers like us, astounding but true. (Most of the national suppliers charge approaching £5000 up to £7-8000 for a pair of their top of the range hearing aids and if they are charging substantially less its because they are not supplying top of the range or another ploy, supplying older technology rather than the very latest technology that enables the best possible results for your money).

P.S. please bear in mind that the majority of hearing aids supplied by us aren't 'top of the range' anyway and most people pay substantially less than the highest prices....

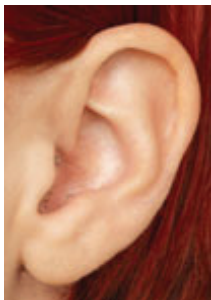
There are quite literally thousands of different permutations of shape and size, manufacturer, and features of hearing aids. It can be easy to get lost in all the detail, as hearing aid professionals we can sometimes forget how much more daunting this can be for you (actually the person with the hearing loss) looking at the whole process with a fresh pair of eyes.

There are a few basics that are useful to know in getting your head around a way forward, it should help to demystify the whole process somewhat, please read on for a beginners guide to hearing aids.

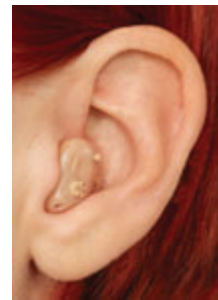
### **The five main styles of hearing aids**



Full Shell (ITE) - ITE's are the largest custom style of hearing aid. They fill the bowl of your ear and can have the most power and features available for a custom product, although cosmetically not great.



Canal (ITC) - The next smallest size is the custom ITC. Harder to see than the larger hearing aids, this size takes a smaller battery but nowadays virtually matches the ITE for power and features, a good overall choice and a 'jack of all trades' when it comes to hearing aid sizes.



Completely in Canal (CIC) - The CIC is the smallest custom in the ear hearing aid and very popular due to its cosmetic appeal and ease of use. There tends to be no manual controls on a CIC, sometimes we can fit a simple push button space permitting, although this can have some impact on cosmetics. Sometimes the CIC cannot be fitted due to small ear canals or very waxy ears, but the last few years have seen the development of very powerful CIC's with no-whistle technology, stretching the suitability of this type of hearing aid to more and more clients.

Behind the Ear (BTE) - This type of hearing aid sits behind your ear and is connected to your ear by a tube with an earmould. BTE hearing aids have the most power and flexibility particularly for very severe and profound losses, although supplied almost exclusively via the NHS system much less so in the private hearing aid supply chain due to people's preferences for more cosmetic solutions and to avoid the dexterity issues this type of hearing aid often brings.



Receiver in Canal (RIC or RITE) - These hearing aids fit behind the ear and send the sound via a tiny wire into the receiver, which is placed directly deep in the ear canal. A soft earpiece holds the receiver in place without plugging the ear canal giving a natural sound and a comfortable fit. They were designed originally for mild to moderate high frequency hearing loss but in recent years have been adapted with the advent of power receivers to be within the fitting range of more severe hearing losses. Like CIC's the RIC type of hearing aid is very neat and cosmetic.

## **Important Features To Look Out For**

**Directional Microphones** – These are available on every type of hearing aid on the market today apart from CIC which quite simply does not have the space on the faceplate for the two microphones needed for the facility of directional microphones. They are the best feature available performance wise for hearing in noisy environments. Directional microphones in the right type of environment will reduce noise from the sides and rear and emphasis speech from the front.

**Noise Reduction** – Noise reduction reduces amplification in the frequencies where the hearing aid's algorithm detects what it feels is noise but not detecting useful components of speech. If there is a fan running in the background the hearing aid will not amplify it as much as it would speech. When the hearing aid finds both speech and noise at a given frequency, you still get both. The more advanced the technology is the better it tends to be at managing noise more efficiently, mainly by breaking the frequencies up into smaller pieces.

**Memories or Programs** – There are two types of memories available on a hearing aid, manual and automatic. Many hearing aids have a push button that allows you to have different settings (memories) for different situations such as quiet places, noisy places, and music or telephone. Generally CIC's and a lot of the smaller RIC's don't have memory buttons and if you feel you need manual access to how your hearing aids are working a remote control may be necessary. Most hearing aids nowadays have an automatic program anyway that adjusts for the environment around you so you don't have to manually change the way your hearing aids are working, a much more satisfactory way of doing things! You can of course have a combination of the two.

**Feedback Cancellation** – Feedback (or whistling) used to be a big problem with hearing aids, particularly when putting your hand over your ear, or perhaps using the telephone. Nowadays Feedback Cancellation (or no-whistle technology) is so much more efficient that in most cases it really isn't an issue at all.

**Bands / Channels** – Bands are what we use to adjust the volume in a hearing aid. More bands means more control when we program the hearing instrument to your hearing loss.

Channels are used to adjust the part of the hearing aid that keeps the sound from getting too loud. Channels can also refer to the hearing aid noise reduction system. For noise reduction, more channels is definitely better because the hearing aid can break the sound up into smaller pieces and isolate noise from speech.



## **Which manufacturer should I choose?**

Even when you have chosen (usually with the help of a hearing aid professional) the style of hearing aid most suitable for you, and you know the level of technology appropriate for your type and level of hearing loss and the lifestyle you lead, there are a number of manufacturers to choose from, all professing to be 'The Best' at restoring your hearing to near normal levels.

It goes without saying, if you have the widest choice possible you should have the best possible chance of reaching the best result. Many hearing aid suppliers are tied down to a narrow range of hearing aid manufacturers they can supply and this obviously limits what they can supply to give you the best result.

Our advice is to always seek **independent** advice. If you speak to any hearing aid supplier, ask them if they can supply from all of these manufacturers – Phonak, Oticon, Widex, Siemens, GN ReSound, Starkey, Bernafon, Unitron. If they can supply all these manufacturers you have an independent hearing aid supplier, if they can't they aren't – it's simple.

### **So how much should I pay for hearing aids?**

That's a difficult question to answer without knowing all about your lifestyle, what sort of results you need, the type and level of hearing loss you have, the anatomy of your ear and ear canal, the list goes on.

You can check out our handy absolutely up to the minute hearing aid price list here <http://www.discounthearingaids.org.uk/hearing-aid-prices.php> but that's just a list of every price of just about every current hearing aid on the market today in the UK, it won't actually tell you which hearing aid is suitable for you, for that you need good advice from a good quality local independent hearing aid audiologist.

You can find a centre close to you if you prefer to visit a branch, however you should expect to pay a slight premium (maybe 10-20% extra on top of our prices) for the facility of being seen in a centre, alternatively you can ask us to put you in touch with a good quality independent hearing aid audiologist from your own area who offers home visits and they will supply at the prices you see on our website, here is a link for you to submit your details <http://www.discounthearingaids.org.uk/contact.php>

Please be wary, a note of caution - Some suppliers of hearing aids, particularly the national retailers tend to supply older technology at lower prices but don't tell you the technology is past it's sell by date. If you see the words 'Two for One' or '50% Off Sale', please be very careful and tread carefully. Some of these 'deals' aren't quite as good as the headline suggests on closer inspection... If you compare hearing aid prices like for like you'll find our hearing aid prices are very good value particularly with the excellent aftercare available.

Also a common marketing ploy is to rebrand hearing aids under a different name or own label which makes it difficult if you want to compare hearing aid prices on a like for like basis. We're very happy to dig around and find out exactly what hearing aids others are advising you to buy... please just ask.

We hope you have found this guide useful, we've tried to keep it brief and to the point, please let us know if you've found it has helped, if you think anything in the guide is incorrect we'd also like to know your views.

**This guide was written by Paul Minikin, a leading Hearing Aid Audiologist and the owner of [Digital Hearing Care](#), one of the largest suppliers of hearing aids in the north of England. Paul Minikin is also a prominent member of the [Discount Hearing Aids](#) group of Local Independent Hearing Aid Audiologists in the UK.**