

# What to Know When Buying Prescription Hearing Aids

## Who do I see to buy prescription hearing aids?

In Minnesota, both audiologists and hearing instrument dispensers sell prescription hearing aids. Under [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 153A.15 subdivision 1\(1\)](#) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/153A.15#stat.153A.15.1>), persons under 18 years of age must be evaluated by an audiologist before getting prescription hearing aids.

## How do audiologists and hearing instrument dispensers differ?

### Comparing Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Dispensers

#### Audiologists

- Evaluate hearing, balance, and tinnitus.
- Recommend, fit, and dispense prescription hearing aids and other assistive devices, including implantable devices.
- Have a master's or doctoral degree and have completed a supervised externship. They have also passed a practical exam.
- Identify, assess, treat, and rehabilitate patients with additional auditory issues unrelated to dispensing.

#### Hearing instrument dispensers

- Test hearing to assist clients in selecting prescription hearing aids.
- Recommend, fit, and dispense prescription hearing aids and other assistive devices.
- Have passed written and practical exams.

## Do I have to see a medical doctor before I get prescription hearing aids?

Since December 2016, most people over the age of 18 do not need to be evaluated by a medical doctor before obtaining prescription hearing aids. However, if a practitioner finds that you have one of the following conditions, they should refer you to a doctor to determine if the condition is medically or surgically correctable. These conditions include:

- Your ear has an unusual shape.
- Your ear was injured in an accident.
- You saw drainage (fluid) coming out of your ear.
- Your ear feels painful or uncomfortable.
- You have a lot of ear wax, or you think something could be in your ear.

- You get dizzy or have a feeling of spinning or swaying.
- Your hearing changed suddenly.
- Your hearing fluctuates (gets worse then gets better again).
- You have conductive, sensorineural, mixed, or asymmetric hearing loss.
  - Conductive hearing loss means hearing loss resulting from abnormalities of the outer and/or middle ear.
  - Sensorineural hearing loss means hearing loss resulting from damage to the inner ear and/or the auditory nerve.
  - Mixed Hearing Loss means a combination of conductive and sensorineural hearing loss.
  - Asymmetric Hearing Loss means the hearing loss of one ear is significantly different from the other ear over a range of frequencies.
- You hear ringing or buzzing in only one ear.

## **Should I buy used prescription hearing aids to save money?**

A practitioner may sell used or rebuilt prescription hearing aids. However, the practitioner must tell you the aids are used or rebuilt. Both the container and an attached tag must state that they are used. Buying used prescription hearing aids is not recommended.

## **How do I learn to use my prescription hearing aids?**

Your practitioner must give you a user guide with your hearing aids and must review the user guide with you.

## **What should I get in writing?**

The practitioner must give you:

- A copy of your contract.
- Information about the warranty on the prescription hearing aids that you purchase.
- A user guide for your prescription hearing aids.
- A notice that you may cancel your purchase within 45 days.
- Notice of your right to cancel within 3 days if you purchased from someone who came to your home.
- A copy of the results of your hearing test (your audiogram), upon request.
- All prescription hearing aids must show manufacturer or distributor name, model name or number, serial number, and year of manufacture.

## Can I cancel my purchase and get my money back?

You may cancel for any reason. But you must:

- Cancel within 45 days of purchase.
- Put your cancellation in writing. Keep a copy.
- Return the prescription hearing aids (mail or return to office). If the practitioner has your hearing aids any time during the 45 days, you have a longer time to cancel. You have one extra day for each 24-hour period the practitioner has your hearing aids.

You can get all your money back if:

- Your contract does not say there is a “cancellation fee,” **or**
- You bought the prescription hearing aids from someone who came to your home, and you cancel within 3 days.

If your contract includes a “cancellation fee,” the practitioner may keep part of the money. The fee cannot be over \$250. The practitioner must refund your money within 30 days.

## I made an “in home” purchase. Do I have any other rights?

If you bought prescription hearing aids from someone who came to your home, they must give you a “notice of cancellation.” This notice tells you about your right to cancel. If you cancel in writing by midnight of the third business day after the sale, you can get all your money back. You can give your cancellation to the practitioner at the address in the contract, or you can mail it to that address. If you mail it, the time that counts is when you put it in the mailbox. The practitioner must refund all your money in ten days, even if the contract states there will be a cancellation fee. If the practitioner did not provide a “notice of cancellation,” you can cancel verbally or in writing.

## What if my prescription hearing aids need repairs?

All new prescription hearing aids must have at least a one-year warranty from the manufacturer. If your prescription hearing aid is under a manufacturer’s warranty, the aid will be serviced for any reason including wear due to normal use. It may also include a “clean and check” service. Your contract will tell you about other warranties you have. Any warranty will be in writing. The practitioner must give you a copy. The warranty must state:

- The name, address, and phone number of the service provider.
- The length of the warranty.
- The prescription hearing aids’ model and serial number.
- The cost of the warranty.
- How much you must pay before the warranty applies.
- All other warranty terms and conditions.

## What should I do before I buy?

### Shop and compare

Quality, prices, models, guarantees, warranties, and service agreements vary. Many practitioners offer more time to try prescription hearing aids, more time to cancel, and better warranties and refunds than the law requires.

### Choose your practitioner

You do not have to buy from the person who tested your hearing. Check your insurance. Find out if you have coverage. Also find out if you need a medical evaluation to have coverage.

### Ask if the practitioner sells different brands

Some brands may fit you better than others. Ask about follow-up visits for fitting and adjustment. Find out where to go for adjustments and what they will cost.

### Ask about regular service

Some brands can only be worked on by certain practitioners.

### Ask about telecoils and hearing loops

Telecoils improve sound from telephone receivers and in some public places.

### Negotiate

You can negotiate the features of the prescription hearing aids and the service agreement. Decide what features you want.

### Make sure agreements are in writing

Get agreements regarding the sale, service contract, guarantees, warranties, batteries, and optional features in writing. You can ask for changes in pre-printed contract forms.

### Ask if the practitioner does “real-ear measurement” (REM)

REM measures how well the prescription hearing aid works when it is in your ear.

### Decide if you want replacement insurance

Compare rates from your homeowner’s policy.

## Key Minnesota statutes

- Audiologists: [Minnesota Statutes, section 148.512](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/148.512)  
(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/148.512#stat.148.512.12>).
- Hearing instrument dispensers: [Minnesota Statutes, section 153A.13](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/153A.13)  
(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/153A.13>).

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