WIRELESS CONNECTIVITY

There are two optional hearing aid components that allow wireless connectivity to sound from electronic sources such as cell phones, computers and assistive listening systems (ALS). ALS installed in large listening arenas such as theaters, performing arts centers, meeting rooms and houses of worship, help overcome distance, reverberation and background noise. These components, usually, cannot be added to hearing aids after purchase. Be sure to insist on them being included.

Telecoils, also called 'T-Coils' or telephone switches, are small copper coils available at little or no cost inside most hearing aids. They receive sound transmitted wirelessly by a hearing loop, a personal neckloop, or telephone ear piece. When telecoils are activated in a hearing aid, they connect wirelessly to the public-address system where a hearing loop is installed. For other types of ALS, they work with a personal neckloop connected to a receiver provided by the venue.

Bluetooth Is a wireless technology offered with many hearing aids. It can connect directly to a variety of electronic sound sources (such as mobile phones) but allows only *one* user to *one* sound source. BT works well in some situations but will not serve multiple users who wish to connect to a sound system. The BT feature in some hearing aids will connect directly to the source, while with others a separate "streamer" device may be needed to allow BT connectivity, usually at an additional cost.

Wireless technology can greatly enhance the usefulness of hearing aids, particularly while watching TV, using a cellphone and in public venues where hearing loops are installed. Be sure to ask your provider for an actual demonstration.

Consider becoming involved in a local hearing loss support organization such as the Hearing Loss Association of America, where experienced hearing aid users willingly share their practical knowledge and experience. For nationwide information visit: www.**hearingloss.org**

For the Hearing Loss Association of America Washington and to find local support: www.hearingloss-wa.org

HLAA
Hearing Loss Association of America
Washington State Association

Hearing Loop

For more information about hearing loops look for venues that sport the logo shown above or visit **www.hearingloop.org**

Some components in this flyer were created with permission from The Advisory Committee for Hearing Loss Awareness of the New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability and the NM Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons.

Buying Hearing Aids in Washington (What to expect)

Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Specialists (HIS) are licensed to sell hearing aids in Washington. Both are trained to test hearing and to fit and adjust today's hearing aids. Audiologists have a master's or doctoral degree in audiology. They are trained to interpret test results from a medical perspective, and to use advanced testing to determine the need for further medical treatment. HIS are qualified to fit and adjust hearing aids and to recognize problems that require referral to an audiologist or medical doctor. Your primary care physician and people you know who use hearing aids, may be good resources for choosing a dispensing professional.

THE HEARING EVALUATION

A screening or hearing exam - Hearing screenings are quick pass/fail tests designed to let you know if you need further hearing evaluation. Hearing exams determine the degree and type of hearing loss, and the configuration of your hearing loss. They are conducted in a sound proof booth, and must be done prior to your being fitted with hearing aids. A proper hearing exam will include testing your comprehension of spoken words, and should include 'Speech in Noise' testing as well.

Your audiogram - An audiogram is a graph that displays the results of the hearing exam. Pure tone audiometry is used to identify hearing thresholds, (softest level heard), at different pitches in both ears. An audiogram also displays comprehension results of spoken words in both quiet and in noise. Pure tone and speech comprehension audiometry, as depicted on an audiogram, provide information needed for proper hearing aid fitting.

TYPES OF HEARING LOSS

Sensorineural Hearing Loss occurs when the hearing organ, the cochlea, and/or the auditory nerve is damaged or malfunctioning, making it unable to accurately send information to the brain. While sensorineural hearing loss is almost always permanent, the loss of hearing can nearly always be improved with modern hearing aids.

Conductive Hearing Loss occurs when there is a problem with the Outer or Middle Ear that interferes with the passing of sound to the Inner Ear. Causes include infections, impacted ear wax (cerumen), fluid buildup, a damaged eardrum or by abnormal bone growth in the Middle Ear. An examination by an Ear-Nose & Throat (ENT) physician is suggested.

Mixed Hearing Loss occurs when both Sensorineural and Conductive loss are present. While the sensorineural component is likely permanent, the conductive component may or may not be and warrants an ENT physician examination.

What the hearing care provider should review with you:

- The results of the hearing exam as displayed on your audiogram.
- An explanation of why you often can 'hear', but not understand.
- Whether or not you are a hearing aid candidate, along with expectations for hearing aid use in a variety of situations important to you.
- Your lifestyle and how hearing loss affects your daily life.
- **It is beneficial to bring a significant other to the hearing evaluation.**

HEARING AID SELECTION

Based on your hearing test results, the interview about lifestyle and expectations for hearing, personal preferences regarding style and your budget, your hearing healthcare provider will suggest hearing aids that will suit you best. Your provider will guide you towards establishing several hearing aid outcome goals.

Types of hearing aids - There are several styles available, including behind-the-ear, custom in-the-ear, open fit, completely in the canal, and extended wear products. There are options and benefits for each style. Your preference is important in deciding which hearing aids to be fit with. It is very important to understand there are tradeoffs with some choices because the features available can vary depending on the style.

Features - What features are available can vary depending on the style and, may include:

- Directional microphones that help focus on sound in front of you
- Telecoils that connect you wirelessly to hearing loops and other assistive technologies that enhance hearing in many situations.
- Bluetooth technology that allows hearing aids to connect wirelessly to your cell phone, home TV and clip-on microphone that can be used in cars and in noisy environments
- Remote control and/or apps to use on smart phones
- Special programs that can enhance listening to music, in groups etc.
- Rechargeable batteries
- Manual or automatic controls for volume.

HEARING AID DISPENSING

Fitting - When your new hearing aids are ready, your provider should show you:

- How to place the hearing aids correctly in or on your ears
- How to access different programs that have been customized for your lifestyle.
- How to use the telecoil feature in a 'real live' setting.
- How to install and/or charge batteries
- How to clean, store and care for your hearing aids.

Counseling at the Time of Dispensing

In addition to instructions on hearing aid operation, you should be given information on:

- How to adjust to hearing sounds in your environment.
- Strategies to help you hear better in various communication situations.
- When to use the programs that have been selected for you and how to access them.
- How to deal with any buildup of cerumen in your ears and on your hearing aids.
- Encouragement to return for adjustments and fine tuning as needed.
- Services available to you from state agencies and other organizations.
- Referral to local and national support groups

HEARING AID VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION MEASURES

Verification: When fitting your hearing aids, the hearing health care provider should use a Probe-Microphone Test (also called Real Ear) to ensure that the hearing aids chosen for you are working properly and are meeting well-researched fitting targets for audibility and comfort. This test is the *only* way to objectively verify the sound levels in your ears.

Validation is where you and your provider judge whether or not your hearing aid outcome goals have been achieved, and what else needs to be done, if anything, to improve your ability to hear in all important situations of your life. Validation is done after you have used your hearing aids for several weeks and should still give you time to decide if you want to keep your hearing aids or return them for your money back minus the agreed upon non-refundable fee.

SALES CONTRACT - When you purchase hearing aids, state law requires that you receive a contract that contains, among other things, the make and model of the hearing aids sold, full financial terms of the sale, and a trial period of at least 30 days.

TRIAL PERIOD - In Washington, a minimum of 30 days after fitting is allowed as a trial period before the sale becomes final. Some providers allow a longer trial period. You should ask about this. It is your responsibility to use this trial time productively. Try the hearing aids in different environments and ask questions of your provider. Make sure you understand the return and refund policy should you not be totally satisfied with your hearing improvements.

RETURNING YOUR HEARING AIDS - State law also requires that if you return the hearing aids during the mandated trial period, you must be given a refund within 30 days of the return date less any agreed-upon charges and fees as specified in the written sales contract.

COMPLAINTS - In the unlikely event that you are unhappy with your hearing aids or you and your hearing care provider are unable to reconcile your differences, you may file a complaint on line with the State of Washington State Department of Health **www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/FileComplaintAboutProviderorFacility**