

# 5 Reasons Why Buying a Hearing Aid Through the Internet Is a Bad Idea

I see patients in my office with hearing aids purchased over the internet. Most of these products are really starter hearing aids. Starter hearing aids might help slight to mild high frequency losses, but are risky for most consumers. These products avoided Federal regulation by Food and Drug Administration, FDA, and State regulation by not saying “hearing aid” in their advertising and marketing. In order to get around the state and federal regulation, online retailers refer to these devices as personal sound amplifiers, PSAs, or personal sound amplification products, PSAPs. Concerned audiologists want PSAs subjected to the same regulatory requirements as hearing aids. Here are five reasons to avoid purchasing online PSAs, PSAPs or hearing aids:



## 1. Hearing loss may be a symptom of a greater problem

All states require licensing of professionals to participate in the sales of hearing aids. The reason that audiologists are licensed is to provide/guarantee of level of protection to the consumer. If during your evaluation the audiologist finds an underlying medical problem, such as an ear infection or ear tumor, early treatment may result in the restoration of hearing without the use of amplification.

## 2. One size really does not fit all

Hearing losses require different individual sizes of hearing aids in order to provide benefit and customer satisfaction. The process requires physical contact with a trained and credentialed hearing healthcare professional. Your ear shape may not be compatible with some styles of hearing aids. The online PSA you selected may not fit your ear. Sometimes you can insert the PSA, but experience pain that leads to an ear infection because of poor fit.

## 3. It is not just about volume

Hearing losses require different individual programming of hearing aids in order to provide benefit and customer satisfaction. Audiologists use sophisticated computer

programs to set the prescription, and can adjust the programming while you are in the office. Your online PSAs have a fixed prescription set at the factory and the retailer simply mails the device to you. You might have a volume control on your PSA, but you cannot change the programming.

#### 4. You need better hearing, not an inexpensive hearing aid

Regardless of the quality of the hearing aid, success with amplification is dependent on in-person follow-up and counseling. When you purchase an online PSA, that is all you get! Your credit card is charged and they send the device to you through the mail system. There is extensive research proving that amplification provided without excellent follow-up services results in an unsuccessful fitting. Most listeners that are hard of hearing want improved understanding of speech. If you spend \$300.00-\$500.00 for a device you cannot use, you wasted your money.

#### 5. PSAs can discourage listeners that need improved hearing

Most listeners having difficulty understanding speech wait a long time before taking action to improve their hearing. PSAs might work for slight to mild high frequency loss, but do not have enough power for moderate or greater losses. If you have a mild to moderate loss and try a PSA, you will not notice any improvement. In fact, you may turn the device up loud enough to hear a loud screeching noise that is very uncomfortable. This is acoustic feedback and results from a poorly fit device. Listeners who experience no benefit with an online purchased PSA because their hearing loss is too great may incorrectly assume that nothing can help them to understand speech better. This is simply not true. What they need is a prescriptive device that fits their ear and their hearing loss. Untreated hearing loss results in increased difficulty understanding speech over time, reduced earning income, and depression to name just a few side effects.

When I see a new patient with a PSA, they may report that they noticed the PSA helped them in some situations. They are here today because they need more help and want a professional fitting. That is probably the best outcome for a PSA.

If you really must try a PSA, contact your local audiologist and ask if they have a PSA in their office that you can purchase. If so, try it. If it does not improve your speech understanding, often they will credit the cost of the device towards a professional evaluation and fitting.



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