

Why Do Hearing Aids Cost So Much?

SERVICE

When you buy hearing aids, you are not just buying an item—you are paying for service. The actual "purchase" of hearing aids is secondary to the evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and counseling. In other words, hearing aids are only a part of the whole.

This is not an "item" which you can fit yourself. It takes skill, knowledge, and caring on the part of the properly trained professional to assist you. If it was all as simple as selling an electronic device, discount chains would have dominated the field long ago.

Service is ongoing. This is particularly true with high technology hearing aids. If a hearing evaluation two years later reveals that your hearing sensitivity has decreased, high technology hearing aids can be re-programmed to exactly match your hearing loss.

If you get a "deal" from a clinic which has very low prices, but then have to pay for follow-up elsewhere, you haven't really gotten a deal. This could conceivably happen, for example, if the clinic goes out of business, or if you aren't happy with the service that you receive.

At Crawford & Fitch - Ear, Nose and Throat, we send reminders to come in for hearing aid checks on a regular basis (there is no charge for this service), and we remind patients when their warranty is about to expire. To practice audiology, a Doctorate or Master's degree is required. To ensure that audiologists continue to be up-to-date in the rapidly changing field of hearing aid technology, continuing education (conferences, seminars, in-house training programs) is required.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Hearing aid prices have actually risen at less than the annual rate of inflation. Dr. Killion, president of Etymotic Research, Inc., points out that for roughly the same dollar cost (when inflation is taken into account), today's purchaser can tap into the millions of dollars worth of research and development conducted over the last decade.

For example, the first digital hearing aid manufactured in 1988 weighed about a pound and had to be worn on the body—the sound was delivered to the ear by a cable. The battery lasted one day, and the programming hardware was very expensive. Compare that to the first commercially available digital hearing aids, which came out in 1996. They are available in the smallest completely-in-the canal style, and the battery lasts up to 2 weeks.