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# Audiologists

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## Significant Points

- More than half worked in health care facilities; many others were employed by educational services.
- A master's degree in audiology (hearing) is the standard level of education required; however, a doctoral degree is becoming more common for new entrants.
- Few openings are expected because of the small size of the occupation.
- Job prospects will be favorable for those possessing the doctoral (Au.D.) degree.

## Nature of the Work

Audiologists work with people who have hearing, balance, and related ear problems. They examine individuals of all ages and identify those with the symptoms of hearing loss and other auditory, balance, and related sensory and neural problems. They then assess the nature and extent of the problems and help the individuals manage them. Using audiometers, computers, and other testing devices, they measure the loudness at which a person begins to hear sounds, the ability to distinguish between sounds, and the impact of hearing loss on an individual's daily life. In addition, audiologists use computer equipment to evaluate and diagnose balance disorders. Audiologists interpret these results and may coordinate them with medical, educational, and psychological information to make a diagnosis and determine a course of treatment.

Hearing disorders can result from a variety of causes including trauma at birth, viral infections, genetic disorders, exposure to loud noise, certain medications, or aging. Treatment may include examining and cleaning the ear canal, fitting and dispensing hearing aids, and fitting and programming cochlear implants. Audiologic treatment also includes counseling on adjusting to hearing loss, training on the use of hearing instruments, and teaching communication strategies for use in a variety of environments. For example, they may provide instruction in listening strategies. Audiologists also may recommend,



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fit, and dispense personal or large area amplification systems and alerting devices.

In audiology clinics, audiologists may independently develop and carry out treatment programs. They keep records on the initial evaluation, progress, and discharge of patients. In other settings, audiologists may work with other health and education providers as part of a team in planning and implementing services for children and adults. Audiologists who diagnose and treat balance disorders often work in collaboration with physicians, and physical and occupational therapists.

Some audiologists specialize in work with the elderly, children, or hearing-impaired individuals who need special treatment programs. Others develop and implement ways to protect workers' hearing from on-the-job injuries. They measure noise levels in workplaces and conduct hearing protection programs in factories and in schools and communities.

Audiologists who work in private practice also manage the business aspects of running an office, such as developing a patient base, hiring employees, keeping records, and ordering equipment and supplies.

A few audiologists conduct research on types of, and treatment for, hearing, balance, and related disorders. Others design and develop equipment or techniques for diagnosing and treating these disorders.

**Work environment.** Audiologists usually work at a desk or table in clean, comfortable surroundings. The job is not physically demanding but does require attention to detail and intense concentration. The emotional needs of patients and their families may be demanding. Most full-time audiologists work about 40 hours per week, which may include weekends and evenings to meet the needs of patients. Some work part time. Those who work on a contract basis may spend a substantial amount of time traveling between facilities.

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

All States require audiologists to be licensed or registered. Licensure or registration requires at least a master's degree in audiology; however, a first professional, or doctoral, degree is becoming increasingly necessary.

**Education and training.** Individuals must have at least a master's degree in audiology to qualify for a job. However, a first professional or doctoral degree is becoming more common. As of early 2007, eight States required a doctoral degree or its equivalent. The professional doctorate in audiology (Au. D.) requires approximately 8 years of university training and supervised professional experience.

In early 2007, the Accreditation Commission of Audiology Education accredited more than 50 Au.D. programs and the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA) accredited over 70 graduate programs in audiology. Graduation from an accredited program may be required to obtain a license in some States. Requirements for admission to programs in audiology include courses in English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and communication. Graduate coursework in audiology includes anatomy; physiology; physics; genetics; normal and abnormal communication development; auditory, balance, and neural systems assessment and treatment; diagnosis and treatment; pharmacology; and ethics.

**Licensure and certification.** Audiologists are regulated by licensure or registration in all 50 States. Forty-one States have

continuing education requirements for licensure renewal, the number of hours required varies by State. Twenty States and the District of Columbia also require audiologists to have a Hearing Aid Dispenser license to dispense hearing aids; for the remaining 30 States, an audiologist license is all that is needed to dispense hearing aids. Third-party payers generally require practitioners to be licensed to qualify for reimbursement. States set requirements for education, mandating a master's or doctoral degree, as well as other requirements. For information on the specific requirements of your State, contact that State's licensing board.

In some States, specific certifications from professional associations satisfy some or all of the requirements for State licensure. Certification can be obtained from two certifying bodies. Audiologists can earn the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A) offered by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; they may also be certified through the American Board of Audiology.

**Other qualifications.** Audiologists should be able to effectively communicate diagnostic test results, diagnoses, and proposed treatments in a manner easily understood by their patients. They must be able to approach problems objectively and provide support to patients and their families. Because a patient's progress may be slow, patience, compassion, and good listening skills are necessary.

It is important for audiologists to be aware of new diagnostic and treatment technologies. Most audiologists participate in continuing education courses to learn new methods and technologies.

**Advancement.** With experience, audiologists can advance to open their own private practice. Audiologist working in hospitals and clinics can advance to management or supervisory positions.

## Employment

Audiologists held about 12,000 jobs in 2006. More than half of all jobs were in health care facilities—offices of physicians or other health practitioners, including audiologists; hospitals; and outpatient care centers. About 13 percent of jobs were in educational services, including elementary and secondary schools. Other jobs for audiologists were in health and personal care stores, including hearing aid stores; scientific research and development services; and State and local governments.

A small number of audiologists were self-employed in private practice. They provided hearing health care services in their own offices or worked under contract for schools, health care facilities, or other establishments.

## Job Outlook

Average employment growth is projected. However, because of the small size of the occupation, few job openings are expected.

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Audiologists .....	29-1121	12,000	13,000	1,200	10

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Job prospects will be favorable for those possessing the Au.D. degree.

**Employment change.** Employment of audiologists is expected to grow 10 percent from 2006 to 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Hearing loss is strongly associated with aging, so rapid growth in older population groups will cause the number of people with hearing and balance impairments to increase markedly. Medical advances also are improving the survival rate of premature infants and trauma victims, who then need assessment and sometimes treatment. Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of hearing disorders in infants also will increase employment. A number of States require that newborns be screened for hearing loss and receive appropriate early intervention services.

Employment in educational services will increase along with growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments, including enrollment of special education students.

Growth in employment of audiologists will be moderated by limitations on reimbursements made by third-party payers for the tests and services they provide.

**Job prospects.** Job prospects will be favorable for those possessing the Au.D. degree. Only a few job openings for audiologists will arise from the need to replace those who leave the occupation, because the occupation is relatively small and workers tend to stay in this occupation until they retire.

## Earnings

Median annual earnings of wage-and-salary audiologists were \$57,120 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$47,220 and \$70,940. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$38,370, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$89,160. Some employers may pay for continuing education courses.

## Related Occupations

Audiologists specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of hearing problems. Workers in related occupations include occupational therapists, optometrists, physical therapists, psychologists, recreational therapists, rehabilitation counselors, and speech-language pathologists.

## Sources of Additional Information

State licensing boards can provide information on licensure requirements. State departments of education can supply information on certification requirements for those who wish to work in public schools.

For information on the specific requirements of your State, contact that State's licensing board. Career information, a description of the CCC-A credential, and information on State licensure is available from:

➤ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852.

Internet: <http://www.asha.org>

Information on American Board of Audiology certification is available from:

➤ American Board of Audiology, 11730 Plaza America Dr., Suite 300, Reston, VA 20190.

Internet: <http://www.americanboardofaudiology.org>

For information on the Au.D. degree, contact:

➤ Audiology Foundation of America, 8 N. 3rd St., Suite 406, Lafayette, IN 47901. Internet: <http://www.audfound.org>