

Quick cochlear implant counseling guide for referring providers



Why you're referring

This patient is being referred to a cochlear implant specialist as part of best practice and quality patient care, since their hearing test results show that speech understanding may remain limited, even with appropriately fitted hearing aids.

When to Refer:

Consider referral for a cochlear implant evaluation when the better-hearing ear shows:

Step 1: Pure-tone average (PTA) \geq 60 dB HL (500, 1000, 2000, 4000 Hz)

Step 2: Word recognition score \leq 60% (with appropriate amplification)

OR

The patient reports ongoing difficulty understanding speech with hearing aids, such as:

- Avoiding social situations because listening is no longer enjoyable
- Difficulty understanding speech, particularly in noisy environments
- Wanting improved clarity on the telephone or in group situations

This guideline has been shown to identify the majority of patients who ultimately meet cochlear implant candidacy criteria, supporting confident and timely referral.

What to say to patients:

“Based on your recent hearing test, understanding speech continues to be challenging, even with hearing aids. To explore the best path forward, I recommend you see a cochlear implant specialist. During this visit, they will assess your hearing, review available options, including cochlear implants, and answer your questions. There is no obligation to proceed with any treatment. This appointment is an opportunity to learn more and understand what options may support your communication and quality of life.”

Helpful Messaging:

Helpful Reassuring Messages	Avoid Language Like
“This evaluation helps us explore your options for better hearing.”	“You’ve failed hearing aids.”
“This evaluation will provide you with the information you need to make an informed decision.”	“This is your last resort.”
“An earlier evaluation can provide more clarity and choice.”	“You’re deaf enough now.”

The cochlear implant team will provide answers on:

- Current performance and best hearing solution for your loss
- Device options and technology
- Surgical considerations
- Insurance coverage and authorization
- Rehabilitation timelines
- Next steps

Common Patient Questions and Suggested answers

“Will I need surgery?”

The specialist will determine whether surgery is appropriate after completing the evaluation.

“Will insurance cover this?”

The specialist’s office will review your coverage and benefits with you.

“Do I stop using my hearing aids?”

Continue using your hearing aids unless the specialist advises otherwise.

Key Takeaway

Referral to a cochlear implant specialist provides an opportunity for further assessment and discussion.

Even if a patient is not a candidate at this time, the evaluation can:

- Establish a clinical baseline
- Provide education
- Support planning for future hearing needs

Learn more about cochlear implants visit: <https://www.acialliance.org/>