

Stethoscope Guide[©]

Independent and Unbiased Information about Stethoscopes provided by:



Welcome to the Consumer Buying Guides!

Our mission is to help educate consumers about a wide variety of products and services. We create our independent and unbiased buying guides to:

- Give you the appropriate background about the product or service you're looking for!
- Explain the important features, functions and qualities of the product or service!
- Provide advice and tips on how to search and compare specific products and services!

This guide contains:

- Background on stethoscopes**
- Important features and functions of stethoscopes**
- How to buy the right stethoscope for you**

This short guide was created to help you understand the basics of stethoscopes and how to find the best stethoscope for you. We do not sell any stethoscopes ourselves, so you can be assured that all of the information in this guide is independent and unbiased.

Background on stethoscopes

The stethoscope is an instrument used for auscultation, or listening to sounds produced by the body. Stethoscopes are used primarily to listen to the lungs, heart, intestinal tract, blood flow and other areas in both humans and animals.

Whether you're a doctor, nurse, med student, veterinarian or vet tech, you can find the stethoscope you need online. Today's makers and sellers of stethoscopes (and related supplies) use the Internet as a primary way of distributing their products, and shopping for stethoscopes online is a great way to research and compare several types, models and brands of stethoscopes to make sure you find one that will work for you based on your needs.

Important features and functions of stethoscopes

All stethoscopes work on the same general principle and share essentially the same design and components. However, there are some important differences among some of the designs and components that can make a particular stethoscope better for you and/or your environment. Here are some of those differences:

Stethoscope Design

The most common stethoscope design is called a binaural stethoscope, which simply means that

is designed to work with both ears. In this design, there are two rubber tubes that connect the chestpiece to the earpieces. Binaural stethoscopes can be either single lumen or double lumen. Single lumen (also commonly referred to as a tube) means that one tube is connected to the chestpiece, and then that tube splits via a 'Y' junction into two tubes, with each one going into one ear. Double lumen means that there are two tubes attached to the chestpiece, and each tube or lumen goes directly into one of the listener's ears. Double lumen stethoscopes are more sensitive than single lumen stethoscopes.

A less common type of stethoscope is the single stethoscope that is designed to work in just one ear. There is also a type of stethoscope called a differential stethoscope, and this allows the listener to compare sounds at two different sites on the body. Finally, the newest technology is the electronic stethoscope, which electronically amplifies tones and lets more than one person listen to the body sounds.

Chestpiece

The stethoscope chestpiece is available in a couple different designs and can be made from different materials. The first design component is whether the chestpiece has a plastic diaphragm or a 'bell' to capture the sound waves emanating from the body. The plastic diaphragm is designed to capture higher frequency sounds, while the bell shape is designed to capture lower frequency sounds. Some stethoscopes use only one of these designs, but some two-sided stethoscopes incorporate both designs so that listeners can reverse the stethoscope on the patient to listen to either high frequency sounds or low frequency sounds. Some stethoscopes can switch between low and high frequency just by adjusting the pressure that the listener places on the stethoscope as it is placed against the patient's body (these are known as 'tunable' stethoscopes).

Other Features

There are additional features and options that are available on stethoscopes, and here are a few of the more common ones:

Non-chill rim- the rim of the stethoscope is coated or covered so that it is not cold and does not cause the patient discomfort or shock.

Personalization- stethoscopes can be personalized with engraving, custom colors, and even custom designs.

Self-sealing ear tips- most stethoscopes come with soft ear tips that tend to seal against the listener's ear canal to block ambient noise from interfering.

Length of tube- stethoscopes come with varying lengths of tubing; longer tubing allows you to be farther from the patient, although sound quality might deteriorate slightly.

Teaching stethoscope- some stethoscopes come with two or more sets of earpieces so that more than one person can listen to the patient at the same time, such as in a teaching environment.

Contoured chestpiece- by providing contour to the chestpiece, it becomes easier and more comfortable to handle- less slipping.

Specialty stethoscopes- most stethoscopes are designed for certain environments- cardiology or general practice, for example. There are also stethoscopes designed specifically for pediatrics, neo-natal, pets, hearing-impaired listeners, and so on.

Skin or clothes- some stethoscopes work better if they are placed directly on the skin, while others can work effectively through clothing.

How to find the best stethoscope for you

Naturally, the choice of the best stethoscope for you will be based on your particular situation, budget, and needs. Shopping for a stethoscope online is a great way to research and compare several types, models and brands of stethoscopes to make sure you find what that will work for you based on your desired features. Some sites that sell stethoscope systems only sell their own brand of stethoscopes, and other sites act as dealers and offer a wide range of makes and models.

Once you have a good sense of what specific features and functions you want from your stethoscope and understand the design and components involved, you will just need to find some or all of the stethoscopes that match your needs and begin comparing them by other factors:

Price- of course, price should be a consideration for any purchase you make, including stethoscopes. All other things being equal, it usually makes sense to go with the stethoscope site that offers the lowest price. However, don't make price your only criteria for choosing the best stethoscope for you.

Shipping- shipping costs add to the total cost of anything you buy online, including stethoscopes, but this cost is usually offset to some degree because you typically don't need to pay sales tax as you would in a retail store. Compare shipping costs among online stethoscope sites as they may vary; some sites will charge you separately for shipping, and others will include it in the final price. If applicable for your particular order, you might want to find out if shipping insurance is included or available as an option.

Warranty/Service- when comparing stethoscope warranties, check for warranties of the web site AND of the stethoscope itself. Is there a guarantee on the delivery date/time, a guarantee on the stethoscope, or a guarantee on the overall satisfaction of the site's service? How will returns/exchanges be processed? In addition, make sure to find out how the unit will be serviced, both within and beyond the warranty period.

To go a step further in finding the right stethoscope for you, it might pay to ask your colleagues and fellow professionals if they have had any experience- either good or bad- with specific stethoscope brands or models. You should also find out if any of the stethoscope brands or models has earned the endorsement or certification of any legitimate, third party entity. Additionally, you should also read stethoscope reviews where you can find them to find out what other users think about a particular model. Finally, you may consider brand name as a criteria. Generally, the best-known and most successful businesses are those that do a good job, earn repeat business, and build a good reputation over the course of time.

In conclusion, we hope you have found the information we have put together for you useful. We recognize that this guide was in no way exhaustive, and that there is much more to stethoscopes than what is included here. We suggest that you use the information in this guide as a starting point in your search for the right stethoscope for you.