

FAQs on OTC Hearing Aids: What Consumers Need to Know

Do you have questions about over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids? Are OTC hearing aids right for you? Here are some frequently asked questions to help you make your decision.

Q: WHO IS A CANDIDATE FOR OTC HEARING AIDS?

A: OTC hearing aids are designed for adults ages 18 and older with a perceived mild-to-moderate hearing loss. These devices do not require a hearing evaluation or prescription from an audiologist.

Q: WHO IS NOT A CANDIDATE FOR OTC HEARING AIDS?

A: Adults with greater than mild-to-moderate hearing loss. This includes adults who are experiencing the following medical conditions and have not been medically evaluated: ear drainage; hearing loss or ringing in one ear only; differences in hearing between ears; ear pain, pressure or fullness; sudden or fluctuating hearing loss; or severe dizziness, also called vertigo. OTC hearing aids are not appropriate for children due to their complex communication and educational needs. Additionally, adults with cognitive or dexterity issues may not be candidates as they may require additional trained support.

Q: HOW WILL I KNOW IF AN OTC HEARING AID IS RIGHT FOR ME?

A: Since no formal hearing evaluation is required, it is at your discretion to determine if it's right for you. Generally speaking, OTC hearing aids are used on an as-needed basis for very specific listening situations, not necessarily all day. Here are some questions to consider to help identify your candidacy:

- Are you able to hear easily in quiet, one-on-one situations?
- Are there only a few listening situations where you need an extra boost as opposed to needing an extra boost in all listening situations?
- Does turning up the phone/TV volume just slightly help you hear better? This volume level may be considered loud to others but is not uncomfortably loud.

Q: WHERE CAN I BUY OTC HEARING AIDS? HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

A: You can obtain the devices online, in store or even through hearing healthcare offices. It's expected that these devices will cost less than \$1,000 for a pair, but keep in mind you are likely not receiving any support or servicing with these devices. At this point in time, health insurances do not offer benefits for OTC hearing aids.

Q: WHAT DOES MY PROVIDER THINK I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OTC HEARING AIDS?

A: The biggest concern with these devices is the lack of medical evaluation. There are many causes for hearing loss that may require medical intervention such as ear wax build-up; ear infections; growths in the ear canal; and many other diseases and syndromes. By purchasing these devices, you are skipping the critical medical care that may be needed. Although it is not required, it is strongly recommended you receive a formal hearing evaluation with a licensed audiologist who is trained to identify and help you manage these medical conditions.

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FAQs on OTC Hearing Aids: What Consumers Need to Know (cont'd)

Q: WHAT DOES AN AUDIOLOGIST THINK I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OTC HEARING AIDS?

A: An audiologist is a doctor trained to evaluate, diagnose, manage and treat hearing loss and balance disorders. OTC hearing aids are a one-size-fits-most. Although you may be a candidate for them based on your hearing levels, that does not ensure success. Audiologists provide education on how to maximize the benefits of hearing devices, including how to take care of them. It is important to complete a formal hearing evaluation with an audiologist. They will discuss realistic expectations based on your individual hearing needs. If you have already purchased OTC hearing aids and haven't had success, an audiologist can provide support.

Q: WHAT ELSE DO YOU THINK I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OTC HEARING AIDS?

A: Ensure you have thoroughly researched the different options available for OTC hearing aids and have read the fine print prior to purchasing. It's also important to check if there is a return window available, and if you'll receive a full refund should you need to return the device. Given these devices are new to the market, there is limited research available on patient outcomes. However, with traditional prescription hearing aids, research supports that the best patient outcomes are the effect of a comprehensive hearing evaluation; a communication needs assessment and consultation; and verification and validation measures.

Q: WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

A: Two professional audiology organizations, the American Academy of Audiology and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, have dedicated web pages available for consumers on OTC hearing aids.

Consumers and OTC Hearing Aids:

<https://www.audiology.org/consumers-and-patients/managing-hearing-loss/consumers-and-otc-hearing-aids/>

OTC Hearing Aids Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://www.asha.org/aud/otc-hearing-aid-toolkit/otc-hearing-aid-faq/>