

# Over The Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### Why are hearing aids being offered over the counter (OTC)?

Hearing loss is the third most common chronic health condition in the United States (Center for Disease Control), but only 20-30% of adults with hearing problems wear a hearing aid. OTC hearing aids were recently approved by the FDA to make it easier for more people to get hearing aids on their own and at a lower cost by removing the fee for professional services.

### Should I get a hearing test before buying an OTC hearing aid?

A hearing test is not required to purchase OTC hearing aids; however, many people over or underestimate how much hearing loss they have, which will affect how well OTC hearing aids can help them. Audiologists strongly recommend getting a hearing test as the first step to understanding your hearing issues. Most insurance plans will cover the cost of a hearing test; check yours to be sure. Testing by an audiologist will tell you exactly what you can and cannot hear as well. An audiologist can help you decide if OTC hearing aids, prescriptive hearing aids, or medical treatment would be best for your specific hearing loss.

### Who could benefit from OTC hearing aids?

- o People who are 18 years of age and older
- o People with mild to moderate hearing loss (up to 55 dB of hearing loss)
- o People who are looking for a cost-efficient option

### Who should NOT use OTC hearing aids?

- o Children who are younger than 18 years old. If you are concerned about your child's hearing, please call 734-936-5730 to schedule an appointment with one University of Michigan Health's pediatric audiologists.
- o Individuals with medical issues should be evaluated by an audiologist and Ear, Nose, and Throat doctor (ENT) before pursuing prescription or OTC hearing aids. Some examples include:
  - Severe hearing loss
  - Malformed ears
  - Active drainage from one or both ears in the past 6 months
  - Sudden onset of hearing loss in the past 6 months
  - Dizziness just experienced or experienced over a long time
  - Significant ear wax problems
  - Pain or discomfort in the ear
  - Hearing loss in only one ear, or worse in one ear than the other
  - Tinnitus (examples: ringing or buzzing sounds) in one ear or both

### What is the difference between OTC hearing aids and prescriptive hearing aids?

|                       | OTC Hearing Aids               | Prescription Hearing Aids                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Fit by                | Self                           | Licensed audiologist                                 |
| Age                   | 18+                            | All ages   |
| Price                 | Average less than \$1,000/pair | \$2,000-\$6,000/pair                                 |
| Design                | One-size-fits-most             | Includes customized options                          |
| Return policy         | Not required by the FDA rule   | Mandated in most states                              |
| Hearing loss severity | Mild to moderate               | All degrees  |
| Selection process     | Self                           | Functional communication assessment with audiologist |

### **What are advantages to being fitted for a hearing aid by an audiologist?**

Hearing loss is a very personal challenge and there is not one option that works equally well for everyone. An audiologist can test your hearing and talk to you about your specific hearing issues and how they impact your daily life. If your hearing loss requires medical evaluation, they will refer you to an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. If you don't need medical evaluation, your audiologist will work with you to prescribe a hearing aid or assistive hearing solution that is tailored to your specific needs at home, work, and around your community. A hearing aid is not the only possible solution to the hearing issues. Your audiologist is the best person to help you find what will work best for you.

### **I want an OTC hearing aid. What features should I look for?**

Soon there will be many OTC hearing aid option to choose from. We expect options for different style, size, rechargeable versus battery operated, Bluetooth compatibility and programming changes through phone apps. Consider what features are most important to you and read verified customer reviews. You should also check the service and warranty options through the manufacturer to know if you can repair the hearing aid if it breaks or if you can return the device if it does not meet your needs. Consult an audiologist if you are not sure if OTC hearing aids are right for you.

### **How much does an OTC hearing aid cost?**

Costs may vary by manufacturer, but on average you can expect to pay about \$1,000 for a pair of OTC hearing aids.

### **Does insurance cover the cost of OTC hearing aids? Are OTC hearing aids considered an eligible FSA expense?**

It depends. Please contact your insurance company to find out your covered benefits and policy information.

### **I bought an OTC hearing aid, but it doesn't seem to help. What should I do now?**

Don't give up! There are many reasons why you may not have had a good result with your OTC hearing aid. These reasons may include a poor fit of the device, a need for more specific programming of the sound, as well as additional support for device use and maintenance. Consult an audiologist to learn more about your hearing and options that can help you.

### **Can you fix my OTC hearing aid?**

It is our recommendation to contact your OTC hearing aid manufacturer directly if you need any repair services.



### **How do I make an appointment to see an audiologist at University of Michigan Health?**

Please call 734-936-8051 to schedule a hearing test with our audiologists who specialize in adult hearing concerns. Check with your insurance to find out if you need an order from your physician for this visit to be covered.