

## Over the Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids

OTC hearing aids are a new type of “medical device” that meets FDA standards. They are designed for use in **adults** with “**mild to moderate**” hearing loss. They **are not** for people 18 years old or younger.

Personal sound amplifiers (PSAPs) are different and are **not** advised for people with hearing loss.

With **mild to moderate hearing loss, you may have trouble:**

- Understanding group conversations.
- Hearing if there is background noise.
- Hearing if people are not facing you.
- Turning up the volume on the TV or radio louder than others would like.
- Your family and friends complain that you are not hearing well.

### Things to Consider:

- You can buy them from big-box stores, electronic stores and online retailers.
- Be sure the package says, “over the counter hearing aid”.
- An Audiology clinic may also provide OTC devices & follow up.
- You may need a computer, smartphone or app to install, operate or customize them.
- There is a wide range of models & pricing. Be sure to find out **the trial period or return policy** before making a purchase.

**OTC devices are not the same as prescription hearing aids.** Prescription devices can be tuned more finely and have better sound control. They also have a wider fitting range to adjust for a range of hearing loss.

### Testing

A hearing test is not needed to buy OTC.

The **best way** to know if they will work for you is to see an audiologist for a hearing evaluation (audiogram).

This measures the degree & type of hearing loss. It can help decide if they are right for you or if a prescription hearing aid would be better.

It can be very hard to decide the amount of hearing difficulty you have or don’t have on your own.

**Audiologists** are trained healthcare providers who test and give advice on hearing loss.

You **must see a medical provider** if you have any of the following:

- Ear deformity.
- Drainage from the ear such as fluid, puss or blood.
- Hearing loss or tinnitus (ringing) that is only in 1 ear or if there is an obvious difference between your ears.
- Pain or discomfort in the ear(s).
- History of too much ear wax or a feeling of blockage.
- Sudden decline or worsening hearing loss.
- Vertigo or severe dizziness.

**Who to Call**

UW Health Audiology  
1 S. Park Medical Center  
**608-287-2500**

University Hospital location:  
**608-263-6190**

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8275.