Frequently asked questions: Over-the-counter hearing aids

Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids are available to purchase at many retailers in-person and online. You may have questions whether OTC hearing aids will work for you. Use this FAQ document to help you understand the important steps in determining the best type of hearing aid for you.

Who can wear OTC hearing aids?

OTC hearing aids will work if you have a mild to moderate hearing loss. They are not effective for a moderate to severe degree of hearing loss. You must be 18 years or older to wear OTC hearing aids. Children should never wear them.

You must consult a medical provider before buying an OTC hearing aid if you have any of the following medical conditions:

- ear deformity
- fluid, pus, or blood coming from the ear
- hearing loss or ringing (tinnitus) that occurs or that is noticeably different in one ear
- pain or discomfort in the ear
- history of excessive earwax or feeling that something is in the ear
- pain or discomfort in the ear
- sudden, quickly worsening, or fluctuating hearing loss
- vertigo or severe dizziness

How will I know if OTC hearing aids will work for me?

The best way to know if OTC hearing aids will work for you is to see an audiologist for a comprehensive hearing evaluation. This evaluation will show you the degree of hearing loss and the part of the ear—outer, middle, or inner—that is causing your hearing loss. This information, taken together, will help you decide whether an OTC hearing aid is your best choice or if your needs would be better addressed by a prescription hearing aid.

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How much will OTC hearing aids cost?

We have several options available from our wholesaler. They range from $300-1000. If we do not have them in stock, they can be pre-ordered to arrive in 2-3 days.

Will insurance cover the cost of OTC hearing aids?

Please contact your insurance company to find out if they will cover the cost of OTC hearing aids. This is also considered an over-the-counter prescription so you can choose to use FSA funds to cover the cost.

Where can I purchase an OTC hearing aid and who can help me figure out the right one for me?

Many places may sell OTC hearing aids including local pharmacies, big-box stores such as Walmart, or online providers. You will make the decision about what you buy, just like any other item on the shelf.

You may be able to ask store staff for help; however, these staff members likely do not have specialized training in hearing loss and hearing technology programming. It is important to read all information on the box before buying a device. Audiologists have extensive training in ear, hearing, and balance disorders and have either a doctoral or master's degree. They can explain your hearing loss and help you consider the hearing aid that is best for you. Some audiologists will help you with basic maintenance of your OTC hearing aid for a service fee. (Currently, carilion Audiology does not provide maintenance service for OTC devices).

What is the return policy on these devices?

If you are not 100% satisfied with your hearing aids, you can return them to the manufacturer within 60 days for a full refund. They do not charge restocking fees or any other hidden fees for returning a device.

You can learn more by visiting Returns Policy | Lucid Hearing

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Why should I see an audiologist even if I choose an OTC hearing aid?

Audiologists are experts in hearing health care—they can help you find a device and provide helpful advice for you and your individual hearing needs. They will also be able to check your hearing over time to see if it remains stable or worsen. Regular check-ins are important: they reveal whether your chosen hearing aid (OTC or prescription) is providing enough sound to meet your hearing needs—or whether you and your audiologist should discuss other options. The common goal between you as the patient and the audiologist as the provider is to help you create a plan and a path toward improved hearing. Contact Carilion Clinic Audiology at 540-224-5170 to schedule an appointment with an audiologist.

To find more information on OTC hearing aids or find a local audiologist, visit The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) or American Academy of Audiology (AAA) website at www.asha.org/profind or www.audiology.org.

Important Note: OTC hearing aids are purchased based on your own judgment. OTC hearing aids will only work for you if your loss is mild to moderate. It is easy to overestimate or underestimate your hearing difficulty. The most accurate diagnosis is made by an audiologist.

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