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The Best Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids and Other Hearing Solutions

By [Lauren Dragan](#)

Updated August 26, 2022



Photo: Michael Hession

FYI

We have updated this article to clarify Hear.com's pricing and privacy policies.

August 26, 2022

For people with mild to moderate hearing loss, over-the-counter hearing aids could be a more affordable and accessible alternative to a prescription pair. This new and growing category of hearing devices relies on telehealth visits, online- and app-based hearing tests, and advanced earbud tech to give you direct access to a hearing-augmentation device that's tailored to your needs, often with lower costs and less of the hassle associated with professionally fit hearing aids.

Make finding the right pair feel overwhelming.

What you need to know

✓ **Who this is for**

OTC hearing aids are for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. Children and people with profound hearing loss should see a medical professional.

✓ **Different needs**

No single over-the-counter hearing device is perfect for everyone, so we offer different recommendations for different priorities.

✓ **Adjustability is key**

Situational sound modes let you change what sounds get amplified in different environments, which means better clarity.

✓ **Give it time**

Your brain needs to adapt to the sound of hearing aids. A generous return policy gives you more time to acclimate.

That's why we spent over two years researching and independently testing hearing-augmentation devices that you can buy and adjust from home. These devices range from basic, inexpensive personal sound amplification products (PSAPs) to highly configurable hearing aids sold (at four-figure prices) directly through health-care sites. We know that hearing aids are never a one-size-fits-all deal, so we focused on finding options for different priorities, preferences, and budgets. We hope this guide will help you feel more informed and empowered, regardless of which device you choose.

The research

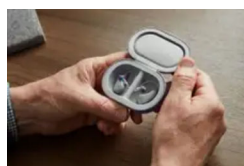
What is an over-the-counter hearing aid?

This question is trickier to answer than it should be. As the name suggests, over-the-counter hearing aids generally encompass hearing aids that are sold directly via manufacturer and health-care websites and can be set up, tuned, and adjusted by the wearer (that is, no in-person doctor or audiologist visits required). They are designed for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss.

Technically speaking, though, “over-the-counter hearing aids” don’t exist yet, since the recently published FDA guidelines that officially define and govern the sale of these devices don’t take effect until October of this year. You can read about the complex legislative journey of over-the-counter hearing aids in this article. As we explain there, a lot of devices being sold and marketed as hearing aids right now aren’t legally permitted to call themselves hearing aids. Some of the devices we tested (for example, the Jabra Enhance Plus) are currently available for sale only through audiologists, but the intent is to make them available directly to buyers once the FDA guidelines take effect (provided they meet said guidelines). Other devices are (for now) available only in specific states that allow for non-FDA-approved devices to be sold if such devices are based on FDA-approved technology. And still other devices, such as PSAPs or “hearables,” are less sophisticated hearing-augmentation options—they have less precise tuning abilities, and the amount of gain (how much they can amplify sounds) is limited by law.

We expect to see some terminology shifts this fall, when the FDA guidelines take effect, and we will update this guide as the landscape changes.

Readers also like



Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids Could Finally Give People an Affordable, Convenient Hearing Solution

Why you should trust us

I’m a headphones expert with decades of audio-reviewing experience who has covered hearing health and protection for the past five years. In earning my bachelor of music degree from Ithaca College, I studied psychoacoustics, the physics of sound, anatomy, and physiology, in

classification laws, and I researched [ANSI+CTA PSAP](#) and [hearing-aid](#) performance-target standards. I met with manufacturers of hearing aids and hearables, and I conducted *a lot* of interviews.

We collected input directly from members of the hearing-loss community by conducting an in-depth survey of Hearing Loss Association of America members that elicited nearly 500 responses. We read them all.

To better understand the current state of hearing technology, I interviewed:

- **Brian Fligor, PhD, PASC**, president and clinic director at Tobias & Battite Hearing Wellness (Boston), co-founder and clinical strategic adviser at Lantos Technologies, past chair of the World Health Organization's Make Listening Safe Taskforce
- **Kevin Franck, PhD**, therapeutics engineer and audiologist, senior vice president of strategic marketing and new product planning at Frequency Therapeutics

To better comprehend the medical perspective and the prescription hearing-aid landscape, I consulted with:

- **Angela Shoup, PhD**, past president at the American Academy of Audiology, executive director and professor at Callier Center for Communication Disorders, the University of Texas at Dallas
- **Catherine Palmer, PhD**, director of audiology at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, professor in the departments of otolaryngology and communication science and disorders at the University of Pittsburgh, past president at the American Academy of Audiology
- **Lisa Vaughan, AuD**, audiology program manager at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas, past president at the American Academy of Audiology

I also engaged with the [Hearing Loss Association of America](#), a nonprofit advocacy group, for insight into the obstacles that the hearing-loss community encounters when considering and obtaining hearing aids:

- **Barbara Kelley**, executive director at the Hearing Loss Association of America
- **Lise Hamlin**, director of public policy at the Hearing Loss Association of America

And to develop our testing plan, I sought advice from:

- **Linda Kozma-Spytek**, research audiologist and technology consultant for the Hearing Loss Association of America, co-lead investigator on the Industry Consumer Alliance for Accessible Technology, a development project of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center at Gallaudet University

We also gathered input directly from members of the hearing-loss community by conducting an in-depth survey of HLAA members that elicited nearly 500 responses. We read them all. Through the participants' generous insights, we learned which hearing-aid features are critical or unnecessary, which aspects of hearing-aid use are most challenging, and what the community hopes to see in future hearing-augmentation devices.

Lastly, we assembled a testing panel that included four people of various ages, with varying degrees of hearing loss and dexterity and with varying amounts of hearing-aid experience. See [How we tested](#) for more specifics on our panel.

What you need to know before buying hearing aids

Hearing aids have come a long way. We heard that phrase a lot—from hearing-loss-community advocates, audiologists, hearing-technology experts, and our test panelists. Thanks to a combination of technological advancement, [increased demand](#), and [legislation](#), entry-level-priced devices available now are as good as or better than most expensive hearing aids from five or six years ago. If you've tried hearing aids in the past and gotten less-than-successful results, don't automatically judge today's devices by the one collecting dust in your drawer.

If you have never considered or tried hearing aids, you first need to make sure you're a good candidate for them. Get checked out by a medical doctor to rule out factors such as earwax buildup or other medical conditions. If you experience sudden hearing loss, it's essential that you get a proper medical evaluation before you seek out hearing aids, since this could be a sign of another condition. A hearing test at an audiology office is the gold standard, but you can also ask your doctor for a hearing test during your annual physical. And you can find many online- or app-based screening tests that will give you a basic idea of your hearing abilities. Should you choose to go to an audiologist, you can ask for a copy of your [audiogram](#), which is a chart that details your hearing ability in a range of frequencies. Much like a glasses prescription details your eyes' magnification needs, an audiogram can serve to customize the amplification levels on many hearing devices.

It's important to check your hearing regularly because, unfortunately, many people who need hearing assistance don't realize it right away. The human brain is remarkably adept at adjusting to progressive hearing loss, said Angela Shoup, past president of the American Academy of Audiology. As hearing ability and sound input reduce over time, the brain's

pathways change. This means people are bad at judging their own hearing ability; this is valuable to consider because your level of hearing loss will influence which type of hearing-augmentation device will work best for you.

Hearing aids have come a long way. If you've tried hearing aids in the past and gotten less-than-successful results, don't automatically judge today's devices by the one collecting dust in your drawer.

For example, one of our panelists discovered during our testing process that his hearing loss had progressed from moderate to severe. As a result, the majority of the devices he tested for us weren't capable of meeting his needs. However, once he discovered his new requirements, he was able to get matched with a prescription hearing aid that's made him very happy.

This experience confirmed that devices labeled for "mild to moderate" hearing loss truly are not equipped to address severe to profound hearing loss. The improper pairing between wearer and device is one reason many people in our survey said they stopped using the hearing aids they'd purchased in the past.

Another reason many folks give up on hearing aids is the fitting experience. In the hearing-aid world, "fitting" isn't just about the size and shape of your ear. It's about making sure the device is amplifying the correct frequencies to the correct amount in order to match your specific hearing profile. Because the brain is so good at adapting to hearing loss over time, the experience of suddenly amplifying the lost frequency ranges can be especially jarring. Shoup likened the process to "stepping into the sunshine after being in the dark a long time." She continued, "Except in the case of hearing, the adjustment can take weeks or months rather than minutes."

This is why it's so important for manufacturers to offer a generous return window for hearing aids. Eventually, your brain will adapt to hearing louder sounds, but it takes time. If you've ever moved to a new home and spent the first few days waking up to every passing garbage truck or door slamming, you've seen this sort of adaptation in action. Over time, your mind learns what's important and what's inconsequential, and finally you're able to sleep through trash pickup. You still hear the sounds; you just don't consciously react to them. By contrast, if a dog whimpers or a child cries, you wake up instantly. It's all due to the way your brain adjusts to auditory input.

So when you first get hearing aids, be patient with yourself. The best way to become acclimated to wearing hearing aids is to wear them (though the audiologists I spoke with said it's okay to take small breaks). If after a week of consistent use you still find the stimulus overly disturbing—and you have a pair that a professional can adjust—talk to the professional about possibly easing you into your prescribed level. This may mean you won't get as much clarity

possibly taking you into your prescribed level. This may mean you won't get as much clarity initially, but it may make the overall process less arduous.

If you put in the time and you find that you still can't hear clearly or distinguish spoken words in busy locations, like restaurants, it may be time to take advantage of the return policy. Mark your calendar so you make a decision on time. Most of the companies whose devices we considered accept returns as long as you initiate them within the stated return window and mail the item within a few weeks after that. But be sure you're familiar with your device's specific policy so you don't end up on the hook for a hearing aid you don't love.

And if you're new to hearing loss, there are some wonderful nonprofit groups to help keep you informed and offer support. The [Hearing Loss Association of America](#), the [National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing](#), and the [Center for Hearing and Communication](#) are all great resources for keeping up on the latest laws and technologies, seeking medical advice, participating in advocacy, and finding community. The Hearing Loss Association of America also has a [handy OTC hearing-aid shopping checklist](#) to help get you started.

Who this is for

Over-the-counter hearing aids are designed for cognitively healthy adults with [mild to moderate hearing loss](#) who are able to clearly communicate feedback. (Someone with mild hearing loss is able to hear some normal-volume speech but is unable to discern what's being said. Someone with moderate hearing loss can barely hear or cannot hear speech at a conversational volume.) Children, people with profound hearing loss, and those who are unable to express themselves or make medical decisions unaided should see a medical professional, since their needs will not be met by the kinds of devices represented in this guide.

Although working in person with an audiologist has its benefits, our survey of HLAA members reinforced the notion that many people are looking for alternative devices that they can purchase and set up from home. Frequently this preference emerges due to issues surrounding transportation, time commitment, and geographic location. If you cannot easily get yourself to and from a doctor's office or audiology office, or if you don't have many providers close to you, going the over-the-counter route is a great option.

Financial constraints were another common concern among our HLAA survey respondents. More than half (53%) reported that they had zero insurance coverage for hearing aids. Of those respondents with coverage, 32% said they were partly covered, and only 11% said they had insurance plans under which hearing aids were fully covered. (The remaining 4% said they were unsure what their plans covered.) The cost of prescription hearing aids varies from around \$1,000 to \$14,000 per pair; the most expensive pair of OTC hearing aids we tested cost \$6,000, but the average price was closer to \$850.

Finally, many members of the hearing-loss community and audiologists we spoke with expressed trepidation regarding a system wherein the person recommending a given hearing-aid benefits financially from the sale and also may participate in exclusive partnerships with manufacturers. If you would prefer to separate the medical office from the purchasing process, and if you are willing to possibly engage in some trial and error to find the best hearing aids for your needs, you are well suited to the over-the-counter approach.

How we picked

Photo: Michael Hession

For this guide, we focused on over-the-counter hearing-augmentation devices that are available directly online from manufacturers or via remote health-care websites. We looked at PSAPs, hearables, and consumer-direct hearing aids with varying degrees of sound enhancement or augmentation and priced from \$95 to \$6,000.

I know from years of testing headphones that no one earbud works for every listener. The same is true for hearing aids. Preference for attributes like rechargeable versus replaceable batteries, water resistance, and over-ear versus in-ear design are largely lifestyle dependent.

However, our HCAA survey respondents broadly agreed that some features are essential:

- **A generous trial period:** 84% of our respondents stressed the importance of a trial period that is long enough to allow you to get used to the new device and make adjustments as necessary.
- **Customizable sound:** 78% agreed that it's essential to have access to an audiologist who can adapt the hearing aid's tuning based on the wearer's input. Adjustability through an app or the seller was slightly less preferred, at 64%.
- **Multiple sound-environment settings:** 73% of respondents said they wanted presets in the hearing aid that are designed to handle the varying auditory demands of locations, such as a busy restaurant versus a quiet lecture hall.
- **Bluetooth compatibility:** 69% of hearing-aid wearers in our survey said they wanted their hearing aids to connect to a phone or laptop via Bluetooth.

Unfortunately, there is no one hearing device that's affordable and durable and packed with every key feature—yet. Some limitations are due to availability. For example, we were unable to find a device available by remote purchase that also offered telecoil capabilities. (Telecoil, T-coil, or induction loop systems essentially offer a means for hearing aids to receive a signal from a local broadcasting device, such as a theater's audio, a public-transit PA system, or a specially equipped telephone.) Hearing assistance also has some technological limitations—like the fact that the smaller the device is, the tougher it is to maintain Bluetooth connectivity. As a result, we realized we had to search for several devices that fit different needs.

Hearing devices vary wildly in cost. We wanted to get a sense of what, if any, benefits you gain by spending more money. We knew we couldn't test every single inexpensive PSAP available, so we sought out the highest-rated representatives in a few price ranges. Then, based on the knowledge we collected in our research and according to the criteria above, we called in 16 pairs of PSAPs, hearables, and hearing aids to test.

How we tested over-the-counter hearing aids

Our testing process consisted of both objective and subjective testing and took many months to complete. For the objective testing, we focused on measuring each device's maximum gain (how much it could amplify sounds) and its frequency response (what frequencies of sound the hearing aid boosted and by how much, and how the characteristics of different sound modes varied).

We were surprised to learn from our sources that, despite the fact that PSAPs and hearables

have a legally limited amount of gain based on ANSI standards, there isn't an FDA oversight board that tests the efficacy or safety of any hearing-augmentation device, including hearing aids. The entire industry essentially polices itself by relying on doctors and wearers to flag deviations or return the things they buy. Because we know the potential risks of listening at too-loud volume levels, we wanted to find out whether any of the devices that we called in would fall outside the ANSI gain specifications.

Senior staff writer Brent Butterworth and I met with Linda Kozma-Spytek, senior research audiologist at the Technology Access Program at Gallaudet University, to discuss what we might be able to reasonably measure. Brent used his GRAS Model 43AG ear/cheek simulator with a KB5000 simulated pinna, in conjunction with an Audiomatica Clio 12 audio analyzer and TrueRTA software, to analyze the frequency response and the gain of our test samples. We then compared these numbers to the ANSI PSAP or hearing-aid standards to check that they fell within guidelines.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that, in regard to gain, all of the devices we tested did indeed meet the standards for their category. This may be because we chose models that had good customer reviews or because the self-policing system works. Either way, it was encouraging data. Interestingly, the newly announced FDA regulations for OTC hearing aids don't have any guidelines pertaining to gain. Instead they include a cap on the maximum output limit (111 dB SPL or 117 dB SPL, depending on different factors). The devices we tested were released before the new FDA ruling was made public, and since companies have until next spring to meet the new requirements, we haven't yet tested to see whether our recommendations measure within the new guidelines. But as we move forward, we'll adjust our testing accordingly.

As for frequency response, all of the products boosted sound in the range most commonly required for hearing enhancement—generally around 2 kHz to 3 kHz for language comprehension—but the range of frequencies and the amount of boost in each frequency band differed. We had hoped to find some correlation between the frequency response characteristics and the opinions of our test panelists, but we couldn't. Ultimately, the quality of the hearing test, the directionality of the hearing aids' microphones, and the ability of the hearing aid to adapt to fine-tuning during the fitting process had more impact on our panelists' opinions.

We relied on testers with varying degrees of hearing loss and dexterity and with varying amounts of hearing-aid experience and technological savvy. This was important because we knew that if one hearing device was liked by a diverse group of people, the chances were higher that others might find it helpful too.

Here's a quick snapshot of our panelists:

- Dan K. is in his 50s, an avid biker, and the father of two elementary-age kids.
- Kathy M. is in her 70s, very socially active, and a part-time caregiver for two grandkids under the age of 9.
- Fiona R. is in her 20s, recently married, and completing her master's degree while working full time.
- Tom E. is in his 60s, does Pilates, and lives with his partner and two boisterous dogs.

Each panelist tested the hearing aids for months. They spent an average of a week with each device to determine whether it was worthy of further exploration. Some hearing devices had tiny buttons or charging issues that were so frustrating in everyday use they were disqualified early on in the tests. Others got the ergonomics right and earned a longer trial for our panelists to better evaluate the sound amplification and adjustability.

Our panelists explored every facet of the process, from participating in remote audiology appointments to engaging with tech support. They installed nearly a dozen apps, took hearing tests, made phone calls, and (most important) lived their lives. They wore the hearing aids to Pilates and while caring for grandkids. One even wore hers to her wedding!

Every panelist reported back with extensive notes, ranking their favorites and indicating which hearing aid they would purchase with their own money.

Though I did examine each device and explore the apps for setup and tuning, I did not personally test the hearing aids, since I do not have any hearing loss. Quite simply, these devices were not made for me. My role was to facilitate the testing process, compare the testers' notes, and draw the conclusions leading to our recommendations below.

Best if you're new to hearing aids: Lively 2 Plus and Pro

Photo: Michael Hession

Our pick

Lively 2 Plus

Best if you're new to hearing aids

These hearing aids offer multiple sound modes, Bluetooth streaming capabilities, and an intuitive app.

\$1,295 from Lively

Lively 2 Pro

Best if you're new to hearing aids

These hearing aids offer multiple sound modes, Bluetooth streaming capabilities, and an intuitive app. The Pro version adds the ability to transmit your voice when you take phone calls.

\$1,695 from Lively

Who it's for: First-time hearing-aid users and people who want some earbud-like functionality.

Why it's great: If you've never used a hearing aid before and want a device that's relatively affordable and packed with useful features, the [Lively 2 Plus](#) and [Lively 2 Pro](#) are both excellent choices. Our panelists loved how easy these sets of hearing aids were to set up, customize, and use. The situational sound modes (such as restaurant and outdoor modes) were actually helpful for reducing background noise while amplifying conversation (which was not the case with the cheaper devices we tested). The traditional, behind-the-ear design stays in place comfortably and is especially water resistant and dust resistant, with an [IP68](#) rating. Both the Plus and the Pro can play back sound from devices like smartphones and tablets via Bluetooth, but only the Pro has the ability to transmit your voice for full headset-style capabilities. (To make calls with the Plus, you have to use the microphone in your phone.) Lively's generous 100-day return policy gives you ample time to acclimate to your hearing-aid pair and to determine whether it's a good match. In addition, with a [three-year warranty](#) and three years of included follow-up care, these hearing aids can adjust to meet your needs for a good long while. This combination of lower pricing, excellent extended customer service, and a long trial period makes a Lively 2 Plus or Lively 2 Pro pair an ideal place to start if you've never used hearing aids before.

Each Lively hearing aid consists of three elements: the body (which houses the electronics and sits behind the ear), the hearing element or dome (which sits in the ear canal), and the wire connecting the two. Even though the body rests behind the ears, our panelists were able to wear their glasses comfortably. But if you tend to find the amplified noise of your hair or

glasses rubbing against a hearing aid to be distracting or annoying, you may want to consider the fully in-ear Eargo 6 instead. The Plus and Pro pairs each ship with several different lengths of wire and receiver dome sizes, the selection of which Lively's audiologist will assist you with during your initial appointment.

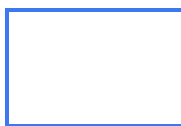
The Lively hearing aids are preset to your hearing profile based on an online hearing test that you complete at the time of purchase. Once you receive your pair, Lively's hearing professionals can fine-tune the sound during your remote appointments, or you can adjust it yourself on the go in the intuitive Lively app. Any changes to the sound profile upload to the hearing aids wirelessly. Our panelists said it was simple to tweak the volume level, the balance of treble, midrange, and bass, or the sound mode themselves, since the process generally required only one or two taps in the app. They were also impressed with the customer service; on the initial call, Lively reps walked them through the controls, the app, and even the settings specific to their mobile device.

The Plus and Pro both amplify voices well. Fiona said she was impressed that the Plus pair helped her to hear more clearly in what were previously her trickiest situations—including communicating with her partner from another room. “I found the noise reduction particularly helpful, as I get overwhelmed and distracted by background noise when wearing hearing aids. Noisy places did still get a bit overwhelming, but the restaurant mode really helped me narrow down to the people right in front of me.” Lively claims that the Pro set offers advanced amplification and noise reduction, but our panel didn’t notice much of a difference between the Plus and Pro in day-to-day performance. Of course, your results may vary based on your personal hearing abilities.

Fiona was very happy with her final fit, saying, “I usually experience pretty intense discomfort with receiver-in-the-ear styles, but something about the material and form factor of this particular receiver didn’t irritate my ear canals quite as much. The receiver dome size options were much more comprehensive than I’m used to, so I had an option for my borderline-pediatric-sized ear canals.” Tom also was happy with his final fit, though he pointed out that the delicate wire that connects the receiver to the body of the hearing aid “can be a touch trickier to manipulate than the more rigid material of a sound tube, specifically for folks with dexterity concerns.” Though he was able to get the hang of the Lively design, he preferred the more substantial grip of a sound tube.

The lightweight body of each Lively 2 hearing aid sits behind the ear. Photo: Michael Hession
The lightweight body of each Lively 2 hearing aid sits behind the ear. Photo: Michael Hession

The lightweight body of each Lively 2 hearing aid sits behind the ear. Photo: Michael Hession



The Plus and Pro both run on rechargeable, rather than disposable, batteries. How much battery life you get using your Lively hearing aids will vary based on how many calls you take, how long you stream music, and so on. What we can say for certain is that all of our panelists were able to get a full day's use on a single charge, and the in-case charging made it easy for them to get some extra battery power while they were out and about.

The Lively 2 Plus costs \$1,595 and the Lively 2 Pro costs \$1,995 (with 12- to 36-month payment plans available); the price includes three years of access to follow-up care. The Lively care team received consistent praise from our panelists. We like that, because access to tech support and audiologists can be a factor that facilitates long-term use; good tech support also can be helpful for people who are setting up the devices for loved ones who may be less technologically savvy. Lively's warranty spans three years, as well, and though there is a [\\$195 deductible](#) for loss or catastrophic damage, that's still better than having to purchase a new pair at full price.

Flaws but not dealbreakers: The biggest downside of high-tech hearing aids is that they require a mobile device to change the sound profiles or situational modes and to update the firmware. For folks on a budget or who are anti-smartphone, this requirement could be a dealbreaker. If that describes you, we recommend the less-app-dependent [Tweak Enhance](#).

Because the Lively hearing aids support streaming via Bluetooth, you have to connect each hearing aid to your device separately, which can be a little annoying to set up initially. Also, if you take too long to take both hearing aids out of the charging case, they may not pair up as a set, which means you'll need to pop them back in and out of the case to reconnect them. This is a Bluetooth issue—many true wireless earbuds have a similar problem. Our panelists ultimately found that the easiest way to avoid connection issues was to remove both hearing aids from the case first and then put them in their ears.

Another flaw is the lack of bass reproduction for music. Both the Plus and Pro can stream music from your phone, but all of our panelists noted that the bass notes lacked the oomph that would come from a good set of headphones or earbuds. If this is a dealbreaker for you, consider the [Jabra Enhance Plus](#) instead.

The charging case is on the larger side—it's bigger than a deck of cards, so it isn't something that you can pop in a pocket and forget about. Because our panelists were able to use the Plus and Pro for a full day without recharging, the size of the charging case wasn't a dealbreaker for us. If it is for you, consider the more diminutive (and expensive) Eargo 6 or [Hear.com Horizon](#)

AX.

Unfortunately, the Lively hearing aids cannot be adjusted by the wearer’s personal audiologist; you have to use Lively’s system. (This was true of all the remote- and telehealth-based hearing aids we tested.) And none of the over-the-counter devices we evaluated had telecoil capabilities, either. We hope that future devices will offer both.

Best for those who dislike behind-the-ear hearing aids: Eargo 6

Photo: Michael Hession

Our pick



Eargo 6

A glasses-friendly option for active people

These tiny hearing aids sit fully inside the ears, so they're nearly invisible and don't interfere with glasses. However, they don't stream calls or music.

\$2,950* from Amazon

\$2,950 from Best Buy

\$2,650 from Eargo

*At the time of publishing, the price was \$2,650.

Who it's for: People who dislike hearing aids that drape behind the ear or folks who are very physically active.

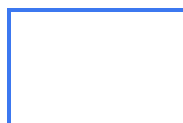
Why it's great: The **Eargo 6** is a diminutive set of hearing aids; they sit in each ear canal without obstructing it. This unique design may be especially appealing to people who dislike the feeling or look of traditional hearing aids, which have a sound tube or wire that drapes over the ear. The Eargo 6 provides situational sound profiles that you can activate by tapping the earpiece or toggling settings in the app. The IPX7 waterproof rating means the Eargo 6 can handle sweat and physically active lifestyles, even if you dunk your head into water. Though the 45-day return policy is not the most generous among the devices we tested, that should be sufficient time for you to allow your ears to acclimate to the Eargo 6 and decide whether this set is right for you. A two-year warranty covers any technical hiccups, and in those two years, you get one-time loss protection. However, the Eargo 6's Bluetooth connectivity is only for adjusting settings; this pair cannot stream music or calls, so if you want those things, you'll have to rely on headphones or your device's built-in speakers.

If you've already seen an audiologist and you have your audiogram, you can upload that data to the Eargo 6 as a baseline when you order your pair. Or you can wait until the Eargo 6 set

arrives and use the hearing aids to take a hearing test in conjunction with the app. Whichever method you choose, Eargo’s audiologists will help you with setup, fit, and adjustments. They’ll also talk you through cleaning your ears and the device. Tom was impressed with the amount of education and support that the Eargo team provided to new owners: “The app was basic and easy to use, so I didn’t have a lot of questions. But whenever I did, there was usually a video tutorial on the site to walk me through it. Or I could just text, and someone was there to help.” Eargo offers unlimited lifetime access to its support team and unlimited adjustments by hearing professionals. Eargo says that “lifetime” isn’t capped at a set number of years—for as long as you are using the device, the company will still help.

The Eargo 6 case charges the hearing aids on the go. Photo: Michael Hession

The Eargo 6 case charges the hearing aids on the go. Photo: Michael Hession



If you have tried behind-the-ear hearing aids before and hated the way they amplify every swish of your hair or adjustment of your glasses, the Eargo 6 set is worth considering. Each hearing aid is about the size of a multivitamin and outfitted with soft silicone domes that look like two layered rows of clear, perforated flower petals. These petals hold each earpiece, as if floating, in the center of the ear canal. Because the design is more recessed into the ear, the

microphones are less prone to annoyingly amplified bumps or brushes.

Unlike other in-ear hearing aids, which completely obstruct the ear canal, the Eargo 6 allows in the natural sound of the world around you while boosting the necessary frequency ranges according to your hearing profile. This pair also allows in more airflow, which was a big deal for testers like Tom who have used hearing aids in the past. Tom regularly attends Pilates classes and was thrilled with the stability and breathability of the Eargo 6 set, saying, “They don't itch and scratch like the hearing aids that use tubes or the ones that go further in your ear canal. With other hearing aids, you get irritation after working out or when moisture gets in there. With the Eargo 6, that didn't happen. Initially I was worried about the size and shape. I thought they'd fall out, but no! They stayed in place no matter what I was doing. This is a phenomenal piece of technology.”

Another benefit of the Eargo 6 design is that the hearing aids are less prone to feedback. Our panelists were able to hold their mobile phones (or landline handsets) up to their ears with no squealing or whistling. They were also able to wear over-ear headphones and the hearing aids simultaneously, which is really unusual.

The Eargo 6 is minimally visible in the ear and doesn't get in the way of glasses arms. Photo: Michael Hession

Kathy was pleased with the way the Eargo 6's limiters reduced wind noise in Chicago. A lot of

the cheaper PSAPs Kathy tested were overwhelmed by even a light breeze, blasting her with gusty noise the moment she stepped outside. But Kathy said the Eargo 6 pair “cut wind noise quickly.” She also found that the situational sound profiles enabled her to hear speech clearly, without too much disruption, when she attended family gatherings or when her grandkids put on music.

The Eargo 6 hearing aids use rechargeable, not disposable, batteries. Eargo says the set’s battery life is around 16 hours, though volume levels, Bluetooth connectivity, and other factors can create some variability. All of our panelists were able to wear the Eargo 6 pair for a full day with no issues. The charging case is slender and circular, with a circumference similar to that of a 15-ounce can—it should easily fit in most jeans pockets. Eargo says that, with consistent unplugged use, the case provides around two additional days of power to the hearing aids.

In addition to allowing user-friendly sound-profile adjustments, the Eargo app can send helpful maintenance reminders, pinging wearers when it’s time to clean, change parts, and the like. This feature could be useful for folks who don’t want to rely on marking their calendars, but it also means you’ll get a handful of follow-up messages that can feel like marketing. You can turn off these reminders in the settings if you find them bothersome.

The Eargo 6 set comes with a 45-day return policy, which isn’t the longest we’ve seen. However, most of the audiologists we interviewed said that amount of time should be sufficient to get a grasp on whether a hearing aid will work for you. In addition to a two-year warranty against manufacturing defects, Eargo offers a two-year limited warranty against loss and user damage: Essentially, if the damage is from misuse or you completely lose your hearing aids, Eargo will replace the hearing devices one time within the two-year warranty period for a deductible of \$295 per ear and \$295 for the charger. Not exactly inexpensive, but it’s far better than paying full price. The Eargo 6 is usually priced just shy of \$3,000. Though that price puts this pair in the upper cost range of the hearing aids we tested, half of our panelists said the Eargo 6 would be the hearing aid they’d buy.

Flaws but not dealbreakers: As we mentioned in our discussion of the Lively hearing aids, the biggest downside of high-tech hearing aids is that they require a mobile device to set up and adjust. For people on a budget or those who are anti-smartphone, this requirement could be a dealbreaker; as an alternative, we recommend the less-app-dependent Tweak Enhance.

Another flaw we noticed was that the Eargo app doesn’t display the hearing aids’ current volume setting. As a result, you have no way of knowing whether the volume is set at minimum, maximum, or in between. It would be nice to know what the current volume setting is before putting the hearing aids in. Plus, a visual indicator would make it easier to track how the volume setting changes over time—for example, if you started out at a volume level of 6 but a year later are regularly at 9, that could be an indicator that it’s time to get a check-up.

Although the Eargo 6 can accept an audiogram as a baseline for fitting, it cannot be adjusted

Although the Eargo 6 can accept an audiogram as a baseline for fitting, it cannot be adjusted later by the wearer's personal audiologist; you have to use Eargo's system. (This was true of all the remote- and telehealth-based hearing aids we tested.) Additionally, none of the over-the-counter devices we evaluated had telecoil capabilities. We hope that future devices will offer both.

Best PSAP for occasional hearing augmentation: Tweak Enhance

Photo: Michael Hession

Our pick



Tweak Enhance

A simple, affordable PSAP

This personal sound amplification device isn't as lightweight or feature-packed as our hearing-aid picks, but it amplifies sound meaningfully and requires the smartphone app only for initial setup.

\$350 from Amazon
(single)

\$350 from Tweak Hearing
(single)

Who it's for: People on a budget, those with limited smartphone access, and those who need hearing amplification only occasionally.

Why it's great: The **Tweak Enhance** is legally considered a personal sound amplification product (PSAP) for now, but its design and technology are similar to those of traditional behind-the-ear hearing aids. This is one of the few PSAPs that our panelists said they would purchase. Most similarly priced and cheaper PSAPs we tested had a too-broad or generic approach in their hearing augmentation, but the Tweak Enhance's amplification and situational sound settings provided a meaningful boost, and the app offers useful hearing customization. Although you must connect the Enhance to a smartphone app for the initial setup, you can make all other day-to-day adjustments on the device itself, a helpful feature for people who want hearing amplification that's specific to their ears but don't want to rely on a smartphone. The Tweak Enhance is just for amplifying sounds around you, so this PSAP can't stream music or calls—but for some people, that's acceptable or even preferable. The Enhance is sold individually (\$350) or as a pair (\$700), which provides nice flexibility for people who need only a little boost in one ear. The 30-day money-back guarantee gives you some time to acclimate before making a decision, and though the six-month warranty is far from the best coverage we've seen, you can purchase an extended warranty that covers you for two years with no deductible.

The Enhance has a behind-the-ear design, with the electronics housed in a slim, lightweight

chassis, a sound tube that drapes over the ear, and a dome that sits in the ear canal. The Enhance ships with two pairs of 2B sound tubes and two sizes of domes. Most folks will be able to get a comfortable fit with the provided parts, but Tweak says other sizes are available if you need them; just call the customer service department at 888-382-9327. The switches on each earpiece are large enough to use even if dexterity is a challenge; one of our panelists has a medical condition that causes muscle tremors, and they were able to use the switches without issue. Tom, who wears glasses, said he was able to wear both the PSAP and his specs comfortably.

The Tweak Enhance's carrying case is sturdy, but it doesn't charge the PSAPs. Photo: Michael Hession



This device has no hearing test built in, and you don't get the assistance of a hearing specialist during setup (as you do with our hearing-aid picks), but our panelists said the included instruction booklet was clear and easy to follow—something that wasn't a given with other, less-expensive PSAPs. You have two ways to adjust the frequency-specific amplification levels of the Enhance in the app: You can slide virtual faders at specific frequency ranges to amplify what you need, or you can input your audiogram. Our panelists said that using the audiogram

was the more successful approach because it removed a lot of the guesswork.

“Good god, this is a hell of a lot better than I remember hearing aids being. I would take these over my old ones any day.” That’s what panelist Tom—who has a myriad of expensive prescription hearing aids sitting in a drawer—said at the beginning of his Tweak Enhance test report. Though Tom would ultimately choose a more advanced pair of hearing aids for himself, he and other panelists said the Enhance is a fantastic option for people who need hearing help only once in a while or want a device that’s less technologically complicated.

Our panelists were surprised that a comparatively inexpensive device sounded so good. Tom said that, for him, the clarity of speech and the representation of musical instruments weren’t too far off from the results of the Eargo 6. The Enhance also excelled among the more affordable options when it came to the directionality of sounds and the usefulness of the situational presets. By contrast, some cheaper devices had presets that overcompensated and produced a muffled or overly loud and distracting experience. Our panel found the Enhance to be reliably useful, whether in a quiet home or a busy café.

The Enhance uses a rechargeable battery, and Tweak lists the battery life as 20 hours. But as with all battery-operated audio devices, the loudness, the frequency of Bluetooth connectivity, and other factors may mean you get more or less time before needing to charge. Our panelists were able to get a full day of use from a single charge with no problems. The Enhance powers up in a little dock that's small enough to sit easily on a bedside table. A pocketable carrying case—a little smaller than a tin of Altoids—is included for portability, but it can't charge the PSAP.

Tweak offers a minimal, 30-day return policy, so be sure to wear your Enhance regularly upon receipt to give yourself as much time as possible to adjust to the sound. The included warranty is only six months, but you can increase that to 18 months by purchasing an extension at the time you buy the Enhance; the extended warranty costs \$75 for one ear or \$150 for both. This extended warranty also includes one replacement of a lost or damaged device at a discounted ~~rate of \$200 per ear for two years from the date of purchase.~~ is bigger than that of the more expensive

The portion of the Tweak Enhance that rests behind the ear is bigger than that of the more expensive hearing aids we tested.

Flaws but not dealbreakers: We're disappointed that the Tweak Enhance isn't water resistant.

We very much wanted to recommend an affordable hearing device that is IP-rated or at least splash resistant, but none of the water-resistant models we tested under \$1,000 sounded good enough that our panel would want to wear them day after day. Ultimately, we wanted to find the device that was the most likely to be helpful for the least amount of money possible, so in this case we prioritized sound quality over water resistance.

We also wish the Enhance had a hearing-test-based profile setup. Although it's nice that the app enables wearers to pop in an audiogram, not everyone has access to hearing professionals. While the lack of guidance may make it slightly more likely that a wearer won't receive an appropriate therapeutic level of amplification, we hope that anyone reading this guide will consider seeking hearing-professional or medical assistance so they can input an audiogram if they aren't able to find acceptable settings on their own. Our survey showed that many people with hearing loss have received a hearing test at their doctor's office but were reluctant to buy a device from an audiologist. For that reason, we decided to recommend the Tweak Enhance despite its lack of a self-administered test.

We are also less than enthusiastic about the barely acceptable 30-day return window and minimal warranty. Though the Enhance isn't as expensive as some more advanced devices, we've seen better warranties on headphones that cost half as much. However, we were impressed with Tweak's customer service. So we are more confident that this company, in comparison with the makers of less expensive alternatives, will be available to answer questions or repair devices.

Best earbud-style hearing aids for iOS users: Jabra Enhance Plus

Photo: Michael Hession

Our pick

Jabra Enhance Plus

Jabra Enhance Plus

Best of the earbud-style hearing aids

This pair performs wonderfully as earbuds and okay as hearing aids. But the set has only a 10-hour battery life and is solely compatible with iOS devices.

Buy from Jabra

Who it's for: If you've ever wished that your true wireless earbuds could be tuned to accommodate for hearing loss and occasionally serve to augment your hearing, the Jabra Enhance Plus meets that need—but only for iOS users.

Why it's great: The **Jabra Enhance Plus** set is one of the first hearing aids released with the goal of meeting FDA over-the-counter regulations. At the moment, that means the Enhance Plus is available only for purchase through audiologists (rather than directly online from Jabra), but, as Jabra told us, that will change the moment the FDA allows it. For now, you need only a hearing test from a participating audiologist to prove that you qualify for purchase. You complete the rest of the process at home. For people who are averse to hearing aids that look like hearing aids, the Enhance Plus's earbud-like design may be appealing. As with a good pair of earbuds, the high-quality built-in microphones help you sound great to your callers, and because the set is IP52 rated for dust and water resistance, it can handle some light rain or sweat. Although the 10-hour battery life per charge is great for earbuds, that duration may fall short for hearing aids. Jabra offers a 45-day refund period, which gives you time to decide whether this set will work for you, plus a one-year warranty that covers manufacturing defects. At \$800, the Enhance Plus costs less than most hearing aids, so it may be a good first step for someone who is reluctant to invest heavily in hearing enhancement.

Similar in look to many true wireless earbuds, the Enhance Plus set was hands down the most popular hearing aid among our panelists for streaming music. That's largely because the earpieces completely seal off your ear canal, allowing for better bass reproduction. However, that closed-ear design also means the Enhance Plus doesn't allow in natural sounds. Instead, the earpieces use their embedded microphones to reproduce external sound via the drivers, as though you were streaming a live show of your surroundings through earbuds. As a result, even though the Enhance Plus set is an actual hearing aid, it wasn't as successful at hearing augmentation as our other picks, especially when representing directional nuance or when used in noisy environments.

The charging case for the Jabra Enhance Plus is similar in size to those of true wireless earbuds. Photo: Michael Hession

Because the Enhance Plus pair wears like earbuds, the fitting process is as simple as choosing the correctly sized ear tips. Then the app guides you through a setup, which involves a self-administered hearing test. Unfortunately, you must use the app's hearing test, since there is currently no way to put in an audiogram. In addition, for now, the Enhance Plus app is available only for iPhone and iPad use. That's because, to improve connection stability, the Enhance Plus doesn't use standard Bluetooth connections to stream music and calls. Instead, it uses Apple's Made for iPhone internal hearing-aid settings (the app is available for iOS 14 or later, while hands-free calling requires an iPhone 11 or later and iOS 15.3 or later), which reportedly help to reduce connectivity gaps. So if you buy the Enhance Plus, keep in mind that you will not be able to connect it to, say, a Google Pixel phone or your work computer—only iOS devices; Jabra plans to release an Android version of the app in the future.

Listening to the world through the Enhance Plus wasn't as enjoyable for our panelists as it was with our other picks. "This one kind of fell into the category of 'headphone with amplification,'" said Fiona, who ranked the Enhance Plus's augmentation abilities in the middle of the pack. It offers multiple sound settings, and the speech setting did improve clarity for Fiona in group

conversations. But the Enhance Plus lost focus as the background noise increased, no matter which setting she used. Fiona also noted that the Enhance Plus struggled to react appropriately to sudden, high-pitched sounds. “They oddly amplified any kind of short, sharp sound to a bit of a ridiculous degree. At one point, I had gotten fake nails on, and they picked up the tapping of my fingernails on my phone screen while texting. I asked my friend if my fingernails were being loud, and she said they sounded normal to her,” Fiona added.

That performance, combined with this set’s comparatively short battery life of 10 hours, makes the Enhance Plus best suited for short-term use. Think office, gym, or college settings where you mostly want earbud functionality but also need to hear conversations sometimes. In addition, the earbud-style design may not be practical for all-day wearing. Dan found that his ears felt itchy after a particularly long day—this is a common issue with true wireless earbuds, so the result wasn’t surprising. Many people new to hearing aids may not want or require all-day wear, but if you do, we suggest one of our other picks instead.

For people who prefer their hearing devices to look and act like earbuds, the Jabra Enhance Plus mimics the popular true wireless style. Photo: Michael Hession

This Jabra pair truly excels as a set of earbuds. All of our panelists agreed that music was the most enjoyable to stream through the Enhance Plus. Not only were bass notes represented well, but music also sounded as though it had been adjusted to their hearing profile. The small

earpieces stay in place better than most true wireless earbuds, and our panelists said it was a breeze to take calls, change tracks, and the like, thanks to single-tap buttons that were easy to find and press. Everyone agreed that the Jabra app was well designed and the most user-friendly of all the device apps they tested.

The Enhance Plus's charging case is easily pocketable, and it charges the hearing aids on the go. The hearing aids provide 10 hours of use per charge; you get an additional two full charges in the case. As with any audio device, real-world battery life varies depending on how many calls you take, how much music you stream, and how loudly you listen.

Jabra gives you a 45-day return window to try the Enhance Plus set without penalty. The one-year warranty covers you for manufacturing defects, but Jabra doesn't offer a program for lost or damaged devices, so be sure to use yours carefully.

Flaws but not dealbreakers: We've covered a lot of the flaws above, such as the set's less-successful amplification in noisy environments, its shorter battery life, and the app's iOS-only compatibility.

Until the FDA guidelines are in place and Jabra can sell the Enhance Plus pair directly, you have to factor the cost of an audiologist visit into the total price. Considering that the Enhance Plus costs \$800, the total adds up quickly. Although we appreciate the hearing-test approach to tuning the earbuds, we also wish the Enhance Plus offered the option to input an audiogram for even more precise results. We also would prefer better water resistance—Jabra is capable of producing some very durable earbuds, so we were hoping to see the same in the company's hearing aids.

Other good hearing-augmentation devices

If you're willing to pay a premium for true medical-grade hearing aids: [Hear.com's Horizon AX](#) line is a good choice. Our panel was especially impressed by the extensive remote fitting and tuning process, the education resources, and the customer service. Hear.com was the only service that shipped out a home exam kit as part of the fitting process. In conjunction with the kit, patients have a video visit with a hearing-health professional, during which the professional conducts hearing tests, discusses your needs, and matches you with one of several Hear.com hearing aids. All of our panelists were matched with the Horizon Style 7AX, a behind-the-ear hearing aid.

When amplifying sounds, the Horizon Style 7AX performed very well. Our panelists said these hearing aids were on a par with the Eargo 6 and the Lively 2 Plus and Pro in clarity, situational effectiveness, and comfort. Unlike the Eargo 6, the Horizon Style 7AX streams both calls and music. It lacked bass in its music playback, but so did all of the similarly designed hearing aids

we tested. Our panel was mixed on the reliability of the Bluetooth connectivity, which is to say that the 7AX mostly performed similarly to [Bluetooth earbuds](#) in that regard.

The portion of the Horizon Style 7AX that sits behind the ear is smaller and lighter than that of the Lively 2 Plus or Pro, which is a benefit. The 7AX is IP68 rated for dust and water resistance, which means that you can fully submerge the hearing aids in a meter of water, and they will be just fine (though the company [explicitly says on its site](#) that you should not do this purposefully). Our panelists liked how customizable the 7AX was, but they were mixed on the app: One panelist found it to be slow to respond, which she said was annoying when she attempted to switch the directionality of the microphone array. Also notable is the slender, pocket-friendly charging case.

After an initial 45-day trial, the 7AX's price includes five follow-up appointments with a hearing professional covering sound adjustments (and cleaning, if you go through an in-person provider). To access this benefit remotely, you need to get in touch with Hear.com to receive a telehealth tablet to complete your appointment. If you purchase from a local provider, you need to go back to that provider for your follow-up services. Hear.com told us that the Horizon Style 7AX comes with a [three-year warranty](#), and loss and damage are also covered with a \$295 deductible. Keep in mind that accessing financing or local audiologists will result in some information sharing, which we think is reasonable, but may be of concern to extremely privacy-minded folks. To opt out, contact Hear.com via [this link](#). (Although the link is labeled for California residents only, Hear.com says that it will honor requests from any location.)

The main reason why we did not make the Horizon AX an official pick in this guide is that Hear.com's pricing approach is more like that of some medical-grade hearing-aid companies, as opposed to over-the-counter options. The company does not publish exact models and pricing on its website. You have to call in for a phone consultation to begin the process, at which time the company will discuss models, pricing, and financing options. On its website, Hear.com provides only a [range of possible monthly costs](#), saying that the amount you pay depends on the options you choose, how much of the cost you finance, and for how long. You can read more on the site about the [financing terms](#), which are not unlike what you might expect to see when buying a car. Some over-the-counter shoppers may not be comfortable with this approach; our testers all preferred to see price options on the website. The model our panelists tested costs \$3,250 per ear, or \$6,500 per pair, which falls in the "luxury" category on the Hear.com pricing structure. When we presented that price to our panelists, they said that they'd choose the Lively or Eargo devices instead. But if money isn't a concern, you'll likely get great service and a device that works very well.

If you're willing to sacrifice features for affordability: The [Zvox VoiceBud VB20](#) is worth considering if you are looking for a less expensive alternative to the Tweak Enhance or you prefer a device that uses disposable batteries. The amplification was quite good in our tests:

Tom reported that in quiet situations, voices were clear, and he was able to carry on conversations at the gym, despite the din of clanging weights. The 60-day trial period is excellent, and the VB20 is backed by a one-year warranty. However, the VB20 fell short of being a pick due to a few factors. First, the app lacks a visual representation of the volume level, which could be helpful for tracking hearing health. Second, although you can adjust the VB20's amplification profile using frequency-range faders, it doesn't provide a hearing test or an option to put in an audiogram. So finding a therapeutic level of amplification takes more experimentation (and patience). And while the dual-microphone array does help to reduce some background noise, the effect isn't completely without distractions. People who struggle to tune out extraneous noises in their surroundings may have a tougher time with this pair than with some of the pricier models. Still, Tom said if he were on a strict budget, this is the pair he would buy.

Security and privacy

At Wirecutter we take security and privacy issues seriously, and we investigate, as much as possible, how the companies whose products we recommend deal with customer data. Because a growing number of hearing-augmentation devices require the use of an app for setup and (sometimes) daily operation, we reached out to the companies that produce our picks and asked them to provide information that we thought was of primary concern for any potential buyer. Here are the results.

How our picks compare

What user data does the app collect?

- **Lively:**
 - Information you provide to create an account and make appointments, including contact info or questionnaire responses, as well as device information, such as hearing-aid tuning.
 - Device information, including IP address, location, user's app and web logs, user's browser, and device usage data are collected for diagnostic and analytics information.
- **Eargo:**
 - Device information: Limited user data for individual device personalization and debugging purposes only.
- **Tweak:**
 - No data collected via app. Data is stored only on the user's phone.
- **Jabra:**

- Information you provide to create an (optional) public account, such as name, email, or postal code.
- Device information, including mobile device ID, IP address, and Bluetooth MAC address, which are collected for diagnostic and analytics information.
- **Hear.com:**
 - Device information: Mobile device ID, crash data, and performance data are collected but pseudonymized.
 - Hearing-aid information: You can optionally provide data such as sound environment and configurations of the hearing aids.
 - App-based telecare information: Only if you use the remote fitting feature, Hear.com collects user audiogram, hearing-aid model and serial number, hearing-aid configuration, answers given in hearing lesson questions and customer satisfaction surveys, processing of audio streaming (not recorded).

What permissions does the app ask for?

- **Lively:** Bluetooth, location.
- **Eargo:** Bluetooth.
- **Tweak:** Bluetooth.
- **Jabra:** Bluetooth, Apple Health app.
- **Hear.com:** Bluetooth, microphone.

Are you required to create an account?

- **Lively:** Yes.
- **Eargo:** Yes, to access hearing health and customer service.
- **Tweak:** No.
- **Jabra:** No. You can [register your product online](#).
- **Hear.com:** Yes, to access hearing health and customer service.

Can the device be used without the app, and what do you lose by doing so?

- **Lively:** No, you must use the app to set up and adjust settings, and to use the “find my

Lively” feature that assists with a misplaced device by using last-connected geolocation.

- **Eargo:** No, you need the app to set up, adjust, and access care. However, once you are using the device, you don’t need to use the app to change situational sound profiles.
- **Tweak:** No, you must use the app to set the device up. After initial setup, you no longer need the app unless you want to input a new audiogram or adjust amplification settings.
- **Jabra:** No. You must use the app to take the hearing test and set up the device.
- **Hear.com:** No, you need the app to configure, adjust, and access care. How much the app is used after initial setup depends on the device you are matched with.

Is data collected in the app shared with third parties for marketing purposes?

- **Lively:** No.
- **Eargo:** No.
- **Tweak:** No.
- **Jabra:** No.
- **Hear.com:** Hear.com says it does not share data collected in the app for marketing purposes; however, some data may be shared with a hearing care professional only during a remote tuning and/or fitting via the app. This happens only rarely.

How long do hearing aids last?

The [Mayo Clinic estimates](#) that hearing aids last an average of five years, with the majority of manufacturers claiming lifespans that range from three to seven years. The life cycle of hearing aids can vary widely depending on how frequently they are used, how much physical abrasion and impact they endure, and how well they’re maintained.

The type of battery used in the hearing aid can also affect its lifespan. Rechargeable batteries eventually diminish in capacity and die. This is a problem caused by the physics of batteries that recharge. And it’s a [problem that plagues true wireless earbuds, too](#)—if the device isn’t designed in a way that enables the rechargeable battery to be repaired or refurbished, the device has a finite lifespan. Devices that use replaceable batteries don’t have that problem, but they come with their own downsides, including added cost over time, the inconvenience of carrying backup power, and a battery-swapping process that can be frustrating for people with dexterity challenges. Which option you choose ultimately becomes a matter of personal

preference.

Many experts we spoke with recommend that, in addition to getting annual hearing checkups, people who use hearing aids reevaluate whether their hearing aid is still a good match every five years or so. This is an important step because hearing ability changes over time, and during those years technology may have advanced to better meet your needs. Of course, if your device is functioning well and you're happy with the performance, there's no need to change.

What to look forward to

In late July, Bose announced a partnership with Lexie (a newer company, founded in mid-2020) and released a new hearing device: the **Lexie B1 Powered by Bose**. We look forward to testing it. Priced at \$900 per pair, the B1 is a behind-the-ear hearing aid that uses an app-based hearing test to adjust the amplification and offers situational sound modes plus treble and bass adjustments. Lexie includes unlimited remote customer support during business hours (six days a week) for as long as you own the device. The 45-day return policy and one-year warranty aren't the longest we've seen, but they're about standard for devices in this price range. Notably, the B1 uses replaceable batteries rather than rechargeable batteries, and it does not stream music or take calls. Lexie claims the B1 can handle a light sweat but is not water resistant.

The competition

Apple AirPods Pro: Apple offers [hearing-aid-like adjustments](#) for the AirPods Pro—including the ability to input your audiogram. But our panel found that the boost was too inconsistent and lacking in direction to be helpful in all but the quietest environments. So we also tested the now-discontinued [Noopl](#), an iPhone add-on that looks like a small charging brick and plugs into your phone's Lightning port. The idea is that you hold or set your phone on a table, and the Noopl's microphone array picks up conversations around you, transmitting those sounds in binaural form to your earbuds. Although the resulting sonic clarity was an improvement over the AirPods alone, our panelists said the brick was cumbersome to carry, and it was awkward to have to leave the phone on a table.

Audien Atom: This inexpensive pair missed the mark in a few ways. The chassis of the earpieces makes them too large to fit comfortably in small ears, the directions for use and maintenance are incomplete, and you can adjust the volume only by using a tiny screwdriver. This set performed well in light party noise, but unless you have larger ears and plan to keep the same volume all the time, you can do better.

Audious: The stem for removing each hearing aid is too short, which frequently results in painful feedback. Similarly, the Audious earpieces produced feedback when being pushed into the ear. As on the Audien set, on the Audious set you adjust volume with a tiny screwdriver, so you can't make adjustments while wearing the device. One panelist said the adjustment slot was faint, difficult to turn, and plastic, so she feared that frequent adjustments could break the volume dial.

Bose SoundControl Hearing Aids: Although Bose seemed to nail the directionality of sound, our panel was less impressed with this set's performance in noisy situations, saying it was middle-of-the-road in restaurants or when music was playing. While the device itself is comfortable to wear, the volume buttons are stiff, forcing you to press the hearing aid painfully into your ear. In the time since we completed our testing, Bose has discontinued sales of the Sound Control.

Nuheara IQbuds2 Max: The IQbuds2 set looks like a pair of very large true wireless earbuds, and our panelists with smaller ears found the design was prone to slipping and uncomfortable to wear for long periods of time. Like the Jabra Enhance Plus, the IQbuds2 set completely seals off the ear canal, so every sound you hear goes through the drivers, leading to less-natural sound. Plus, the battery life was insufficient: Fiona commented, "I wore them for three hours, and according to the app, that took me down to around 30% after starting from a full charge. A full-time user would probably not find these adequate."

Olive Union Olive Pro: This pair worked fine as earbuds but sadly it was a bit of a mess at hearing augmentation, which is probably why it has now been discontinued. The app's hearing test was able to evaluate panelists' hearing ability with an accuracy close to that of professional audiograms, and the resulting boost did add clarity to speech in less noisy environments. However, the Olive Pro suffers from latency issues—on occasion, the sound you hear is out of sync with what you see by several milliseconds, which is very distracting.

Onebridge Rechargeable J707: The Onebridge is aggressively marketed in search-engine results and seemingly has a large number of positive reviews, so we decided to test a pair. The experience was absolutely wild. First, our pair arrived with two different manuals with two different lists of setup instructions. Then, Dan discovered that, due to the way the charging dock is designed, closing the lid causes the charging connectors to disconnect from the dock—so the earpieces don't charge. Digging through the reviews, we found that some desperate folks were actually taping the Onebridge down to its dock every night. Although the J707 is listed as "noise cancelling," it does not cancel noise actively or isolate from noise passively. In hope of receiving a replacement, we reached out to Onebridge's customer service through the contact email, chat function, and listed phone number. Unfortunately, the number was disconnected, and nobody responded to our repeated emails and messages. In short, as Dan put it, "these are unusable."

Sound World Solutions CS50+: This model was a pick in Wirecutter's previous PSAP guide.

Since that time, technology has progressed, leaving the CS50+ feeling dated. Though our panelists liked the built-in hearing test, Fiona described the design as “chunky, like an old Bluetooth headset.” Even after customizing the sound, she was unhappy with the performance. “They really only seem to amplify sounds within a very short radius, but somehow also didn't do much to help with distinguishing close conversation in a noisy area. I had to take them out after about five minutes of use at a bar. My glasses also rubbed uncomfortably against the rather large behind-the-ear component.” The CS50+ is priced around the same as the Tweak Enhance, which is a better choice.

Volume 10 Digital Hearing Amplifier: The Volume 10 pair is typically priced under \$100, and at the time we began our testing, it was a top result on Amazon, so we purchased it.

Unfortunately, our panel quickly dismissed this pair. The instructions were unclear. The build was clunky, which Tom said could make someone feel self-conscious when wearing the pieces. The volume controls were easy to bump accidentally, after which it took several more taps to cycle back to the original volume level. Worse, the earpieces amplified indiscriminately. As Tom said, “If I’m watching TV in the living room, and my partner takes a pan off of the stove in the kitchen, I hear that pan as loud or louder than the TV.” Not ideal. Perhaps unsurprisingly, shortly after we completed testing, the device was no longer available to purchase on Amazon. With no company website or contact information, we had no way to reach Volume 10 with questions, a situation that added even more evidence to our advice of sticking to established brands.

Even though this guide is very long—more than 11,000 words—we still couldn’t come close to detailing every aspect of every hearing device we evaluated. If you have specific questions about any of the models we’ve tested, feel free to reach out to our team via Twitter (@wirecutter) or email (notes@wirecutter.com), and we’ll be happy to help.

This article was edited by Adrienne Maxwell and Grant Clauser.

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About your guide

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Lauren Dragan is a senior staff writer and has tested over 1,000 headphones for Wirecutter. She has a BA from Ithaca College in music performance and audio production. She's been featured in *Good Morning America*, *NBC Nightly News*, *The New York Times*, and more. Additionally, she's a voice actor whose work includes projects for Disney and Mattel.

Further reading

Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids Could Finally Give People an Affordable, Convenient Hearing Solution

When—and How—to Protect Your Hearing

Noise-Induced Hearing Loss in Kids Is a Growing Problem. Here's How to Protect Little Ears.

Is Your Hearing at Risk? Here's What You Can Do

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