

Who may NOT be an ideal candidate for OTC hearing aids:

- **Size** – OTC aids are not custom fit. Consider how earbuds fit in the ears. If these do not fit well and stay in place, patients will likely have fit issues with the OTC devices as well. Small ears or large ears may not fit the “one size fits all” size provided.
- **Warranty** - Most OTC hearing aids come with a warranty for manufacturer defects only. Most hearing aid repairs result from wax or moisture – this would NOT be covered under the warranty. Prescription hearing aids come standard with a 3 year warranty for repairs. If patients sweat, are in areas with high humidity, get ear infections, have moisture in the ears from swimming, etc., OTC devices will be more susceptible to damage.
- **Repairs** – IF the devices DO qualify for a repair, ALL components must be sent in. This means if there is a problem with only one hearing aid, they still need to send both devices plus the charger, if applicable, in for repair. This would leave the patient without any hearing aids for the duration of the repair.
- **Repairs** – patients need to determine who they contact when they need a repair. Some devices can only be sent in from the location they are purchased while others would need to be sent by the patient. Patients may be responsible for shipping charges. Manufacturers may encourage shipments to be insured or hold the patient responsible if anything happens to them in transit.
- **Warranty** – OTC devices do not include Loss & Damage insurance. If the patient loses the device, they must purchase a new set.
- Devices can only be **purchased as a set** – you cannot purchase only one.
- Most OTC devices have a lower **moisture and dust rating** than prescription aids. Current prescription aids are rated IP68, which is the highest moisture resistance and dust proof rating for electronic devices. OTC devices are IP57 in many cases, so they are susceptible to more moisture and dust buildup (which, again, is not covered under their warranty).
- **Trial period** - Most devices do include a trial period, but patients need to read the fine print! These trial periods cannot be extended. Some of the fine print I’ve seen for various devices say “devices must be RECEIVED within 30 days”, “must be in like new condition”, “all materials, including free gifts must be returned to qualify for refund”, etc. Restocking fees may apply.
- **Customization** – feedback management (so aids don’t whistle) and noise reduction are standard features in prescription hearing aids. While these features may be available in OTC hearing aids,

they are generally manually controlled, not automatic, so patients will need to continually adjust their devices in order to obtain the optimal settings.

- **Customization for hearing loss:** many OTC devices have bass and treble adjustments. For patients with flat loss, this may work well; however, for those with sloping hearing losses, frequencies will be under or over amplified due to the lack of precise fine tuning.
- **Technology:** Patients will need to be able to pair devices with their smartphone and use proprietary apps for fitting and adjusting their devices. Patients should check that their cell phone is compatible with the required app.
- **Cost** – patients may save money up front, but pay more in the long run for an inferior product with limited customization. In the US, 30-33% of patients who could benefit from hearing aids get them. In countries like Denmark where hearing aids are free, the rate is still only 40%. This indicates cost is not the sole reason people are not getting aids.
- **Insurance** does not currently cover OTC hearing aids.
- **Pricing** - Set pricing for OTC devices have been established by the manufacturers. This means our price is the same as that of Best Buy, Walgreens, Walmart, etc. No one can advertise or charge more or less than others.
- **Professional Care** – Patient satisfaction with prescription hearing aids in the US is currently 83% (as a reference, Mercedes Benz satisfaction rate is 76%) so the current medical model is successful. Lower satisfaction rates have been measured in countries that already have OTC and self fit hearing aids.
- **Advertising** – all the press regarding OTC devices has brought a lot of attention to hearing healthcare, which is a good thing! Patients may seek help for hearing loss sooner than they have in the past. Currently, patients wait an average of 5-7 years from the point they notice a problem to the point they seek help. OTCs can help us to identify and treat hearing loss sooner. The increase in adoption of any hearing devices can also reduce the stigma that “hearing aids are only for old people”, which may encourage those on the fence about getting hearing aids to seek that help.