

Take control of your sound exposure with earplugs or earmuffs



The best way to protect your hearing is to be aware of your exposure to loud sound and look for ways to reduce it. This could mean turning down the volume a notch when you're listening to loud music on your phone or in the car, choosing to buy a power tool that has a lower noise rating, or standing a little further away from the speakers at your next live music gig.

When the noise you're trying to avoid is the drone of a power tool or a lawn mower, putting on a set of earmuffs or using earplugs is a great option – not only will you protect your hearing, you'll also block out the unwanted sound.

When it comes to hearing protectors, you've got a few different options. What suits one person won't suit everyone – our ears come in different shapes and sizes, our noise-reduction needs vary, some people want to stand out, while others prefer to be discreet. The most important thing is to find an option that's comfortable for you.

Should I wear my hearing aids when using earmuffs? It may be more convenient to leave your hearing aids in and turned on when you wear earmuffs. That's completely fine provided they're comfortable and don't whistle. But it's also perfectly OK to take them out if you prefer.

Here's a rundown of the main types of hearing protectors available.

- **Foam earplugs.** Cheap, disposable, brightly coloured, highly visible, and designed for industrial use. Some people find they're not particularly comfortable if worn for a long period of time, but they provide a significant drop in the sound level if worn correctly. Always follow the instructions and roll them before inserting to maximise their effectiveness.
- **Mouldable earplugs** are made of silicon or wax. They come in small round balls that you soften by gently rubbing between your fingers before pressing into your ear. They are often recommended for swimming or sleeping, but they can also be used to cut down the sound level when you're in the toolshed. You'll find them at pharmacies or online. Brands include [Mack's Pillow soft Silicone Putty Ear Plugs](#) and [Earjobs Comfy Wax](#).
- **Earmuffs.** A common sight on construction workers and landscapers, most earmuffs provide a high level of attenuation so they're suitable for blocking out the sound of noisy power tools, garden equipment, and firearms. Choose a pair that's comfortable and make sure the muffs fit snugly around your ears with a good seal to prevent noise leaking in. They're available at hardware stores and shooting suppliers.
- **Custom earplugs** will set you back around \$200-\$300 but can be worn for years. They are very discreet, are custom-made for your ears only and usually come with a range of interchangeable filters so you can choose an attenuation level that's right for you.
- **For the kids.** Some companies make smaller earmuffs especially for children. For really small people, try baby earmuffs! Brands include: [Ems4Kids](#), [Alpine Muffys](#), [Peltor](#), and [Silenta](#).

How do I know how much protection I'm getting?

When you're shopping around for hearing protectors, you'll find that many products include a number to indicate how much sound the protectors cut out (the attenuation level). Depending on where the device is manufactured, it might be an SLC80, SNR, or NRR, and it's usually expressed in decibels (dB). These figures are all calculated using slightly different formulas, but the important thing to know is that the higher the number, the more noise reduction the protectors are likely to provide.

But not everyone will get the same level of attenuation. It will vary depending on the shape and size of your ears, how well the device fits you, how deeply they're inserted into the ear canal or how snugly they fit around your ears. This means that the actual attenuation you receive from a particular device may be more or less than the attenuation figures provided by the manufacturer.

The bottom line is: the louder the tool, the higher the attenuation level you need.

To find out if your hearing protectors are giving you at least 15 dB of attenuation, check for yourself using this online fitchecker: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining/content/quickfitweb.html>