

On August 16 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) established a new category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing devices, enabling consumers with perceived mild to moderate hearing impairment to purchase hearing devices directly from stores or online retailers without the need for a medical exam, prescription or fitting by an audiologist.

**How are OTCs different from hearing aids?**

| <b>Key Differences</b>         | <b>Prescription Hearing Aids</b>  | <b>OTC devices</b>                                 |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Who fits them?                 | Audiologist or Hearing Instrument Specialist (HIS), to prescriptive target designed to maximize benefit | Self-fitted via app, or factory preset             |
| Cost                           | Approx \$1000 – 3,000 per aid   | Unknown, likely less than \$1,000                  |
| Hearing assessment for fitting | Conducted by regulated hearing health care professional   | Approximated by self via app, depending on product |
| Degree of hearing loss         | Mild to severe/profound   | Mild to moderate                                   |
| Styles                         | Wide range, from completely in the canal to behind the ear  | Limited styles, mostly behind the ear or earbud    |
| Ear coupling                   | Custom fitting from ear impressions taken by Audiologist or HIS, as needed                              | Generic tips                                       |
| Intended user                  | All ages, all types of hearing loss; Audiologist will refer to physician when indicated                 | 18+ with no complex medical conditions             |

The purpose of the FDA ruling is to increase the accessibility and affordability of hearing devices while assuring their quality and safety. Like buying reading glasses at the drug store, this will help to introduce those with mild hearing loss to the benefits of amplification and reduce the stigma around hearing aids. While this welcome development makes sense for many, some will need help in order to receive maximum benefit from the devices. When choosing the hearing device that’s best for you, several factors should be taken into account including your hearing loss, ear anatomy, hearing needs, lifestyle, physical and cognitive abilities, budget and more. Some types of hearing loss are caused by medical problems that need to be addressed before hearing devices are fitted. Audiologists are trained to recognize these issues and help clients to get the right care.

Many older adults will require assistance and support in order to receive optimal benefit and satisfaction from hearing devices and will have a higher chance of this if fitted by an audiologist. The experienced audiologists at Baycrest Hearing Services can prescribe the most appropriate hearing aids for you or provide assistance and support with fitting and programming OTC devices for an unbundled service fee for those who need it.

Call 416 785 2476 or email us at [hearing@baycrest.org](mailto:hearing@baycrest.org) for more information or to make an appointment