

New Over-the-Counter Retail 'Hearables' Hearing Aids Vs Traditional Practitioner Dispensed Hearing Aids

The biggest advantage for the 'hear-ables' is their potential low cost. They are available *over-the-counter* and in many retail or online outlets without an audiological assessment nor prescription. I counsel my patients with a slight to mild or moderate hearing impairment that these systems could be worth a try. But, just make sure that the Store allows you to try these systems and will return your money if the system does not meet your expectations.

Advantages:

- Potential low cost
- Availability, *over-the-counter*
- Adjustable typically with a smart phone
- Quick results
- Fitting process, 'plug-n-play'
- Some allow streaming through Smart Phones
- Good way to be introduced to hearing healthcare
- Can be recharge-able or battery operated

Disadvantages:

- Patient may have more extreme impairment beyond the 'hearables' capability
- Providers are unable to make ANY fine-tuning adjustments
- Cannot detect if wax is causing any hearing difficulties
- Not for any patients with medical ear pathologies
- Do not process wind noise
- Shorter Warranties
- Variable battery life
- OTC devices are not as affordable as they are being advertised.
Good OTC devices range from \$699-\$1299 or more
- Moderate to Profound losses not served well by the *over the counter* 'hearables'
- Fittings and adjustments may be needed go beyond what is available in 'hearables'
 - Variable frequency bands not available
 - Occlusion difficult to manage
 - Adjustments to improve clarity difficult
- Features and Accessory (if any) difficult to manage
- Patients must be 100% independent to qualify for an OTC product. If a patient needs any hand holding or assistance, they are not a candidate!

We are just now beginning to get some patient feedback. And I am trying to gain more personal experience given my own severe to profound sloping low-to-high frequency loss. My best guidance is to tell my patients that 'hear-ables' are much like buying inexpensive readers (glasses) available from racks in prominent retail stores. You may benefit if they work for you.. and for a lot less money. However, if your eyesight impairment is moderate to significant, you will probably need to have a full eye exam assessment and go through proper fitting session(s). So, it is with good technology hearing systems.