

Over the Counter Hearing Aids for Alport Syndrome Hearing Loss - Things to Consider

Have Friends or Loved Ones Who Are Considering OTC Hearing Aids?

With over-the-counter (OTC) hearing devices now available in stores and online, those just starting on their hearing loss journey with Alport syndrome may wonder if this new, do-it-yourself option that doesn't require a prescription or a hearing evaluation is the best approach to treatment. The truth is that managing your hearing health on your own has its drawbacks. The smartest first step for any patient with hearing difficulties is to get a hearing evaluation from a licensed doctor of audiology, even if they are already planning to buy an OTC hearing aid.

Why Being Evaluated and Guided by a Doctor of Audiology Is Important:

Pinpoint the Degree of Loss - A doctor of audiology will help determine the severity and type of loss an individual may be experiencing. They will fully evaluate the ear and the hearing system, which is important to rule out easily treated medical conditions such as wax build-up in the ear canal or other mechanical issues. They will determine if there is hearing loss in one or both ears and help the individual know if hearing aids are the best option by performing a communication needs assessment. Knowing this information is important because OTCs are only for people with mild to moderate hearing loss. If you have severe hearing loss, OTCs won't provide the proper amplification levels. If you have asymmetrical hearing loss or other medical issues of the ear or auditory system, these need to be addressed before pursuing amplification.

Offer Treatment for All Ages - Have a child with hearing loss caused by Alport syndrome? Since OTCs are for adults 18 and older, they'll require prescription devices from a doctor of audiology. This is a regulation developed to protect children. It is meant to protect children from over-amplification, which could cause further hearing loss. Having the prescriptive device fit by a hearing healthcare professional will give the child safe amplification with appropriate audibility of speech information, which is imperative for speech and language development as well as success in school. In some cases, children with hearing loss will require extra help to improve their hearing in background noise (aka noisy classrooms and school auditoriums). The hearing healthcare professional can work with the educators and school audiologists to make sure the child's situation is optimal for learning. This can look like personal microphone systems, FM systems, sound field amplification systems, auditory verbal therapy, and speech therapy.

Serve as Your Long-Term Hearing Health Care Partner - A doctor of audiology can help guide you to the device best suited to your needs. That could be an OTC device today, but a prescription device may be more appropriate in the future—hearing loss treatment isn't a one-time event. It is recommended to establish a relationship with a good audiology clinic near you, as hearing loss associated with Alport syndrome is known to be progressive. You will need annual monitoring of the hearing loss to ensure your devices are appropriate and if you are wearing hearing devices that your settings are meeting your audiological needs.

If prescription devices are needed, doctors of audiology are skilled in selecting the appropriate technology, programming it to fit your unique hearing profile and providing follow-up care for optimal hearing. It is important to know that there are all types of hearing aids and service plans available in the hearing healthcare world and so there is a solution for most budgets.

Getting treatment for hearing loss is a life-changing decision. As an audiologist that treats patients with hearing loss caused by Alport syndrome, I advise patients to be evaluated and guided by a trusted professional. Before purchasing any device—OTC or prescription—I highly recommend scheduling a hearing evaluation with a doctor of audiology.

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