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Hearing Help Tech

OTC hearing aids, AirPods hearing mode, and more — the new options, explained in plain English

A plain-English guide to hearing better

New tools, less cost — and real help

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For OTC hearing aids & AirPods · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to the new world of hearing-help technology. In recent years, help with mild-to-moderate hearing trouble has become far more affordable and easier to get — **over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids** you can buy without a prescription, and even a **hearing-aid feature built into AirPods**. This guide explains these options in plain English, helps you understand which might suit you, and walks through setting them up. **One honest note up front:** this guide covers the *technology*; for your actual hearing health, especially anything sudden, painful, or one-sided, please see a doctor or hearing professional. Read on at your own pace.

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PART 1

Understanding Your Options

What's newly changed in hearing help, the kinds of devices now available, and — importantly — when to see a professional rather than reach for a gadget. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Whoever is holding this book — this is for **you**, or perhaps for someone you love whose hearing isn't what it was. If you've been saying “what?” a little more often, turning the TV up, or struggling to follow conversation in a noisy restaurant, there's genuinely good news: help has become far more affordable and easier to get than it used to be.

I'm Bill. Helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I wrote this guide the way I'd sit beside you at your kitchen table: patiently, in plain English. I want to be upfront about one thing, though: I help with the **technology** — the devices, the apps, the setup. For your actual *hearing health*, the right people are doctors and hearing professionals, and I'll point you to them whenever that's the wiser path.

Why this matters

Hearing well isn't a small thing — it's how we stay connected to the people and world around us. Struggling to hear can quietly lead to missing out, feeling left out of conversations, and even withdrawing from the things we love. The new, affordable hearing tools can help with that, and this guide is here to make them understandable and approachable.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Staying connected to the conversations that matter

Being able to hear your grandchildren clearly, follow the dinner-table conversation, enjoy the TV at a comfortable volume, catch the pastor's sermon — these are the things good hearing gives back. The new tools can help restore them for many people with mild-to-moderate trouble, at a fraction of the old cost. That connection is what this guide is really about.

And I'm only a phone call away

Setting up a hearing device or an AirPods feature can feel fiddly, but you don't have to do it alone. Call me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll work through the technology together, patiently. And for the medical side, I'll always encourage you toward the right professional. Let's help you hear the world a little better.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What's Changed in Hearing Help

For a long time, getting help with hearing meant an expensive visit to a specialist and hearing aids costing thousands of dollars — out of reach for many. In recent years, that has changed in two big, welcome ways.

The two big changes

- **Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids** — since a 2022 rule change, you can now buy real hearing aids **without a prescription or a specialist visit**, directly from stores and online, for *mild-to-moderate* hearing loss. They're far cheaper than traditional ones.
- **Everyday earbuds that help you hear** — Apple's **AirPods Pro** now include an FDA-authorized **hearing-aid feature**, so a device many people already own (or would enjoy anyway) can double as a hearing helper.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is a genuine, meaningful change — not hype

These aren't gimmicks. OTC hearing aids are regulated, real hearing aids, and the AirPods hearing feature is **authorized by the FDA** — the U.S. agency that oversees medical devices. For people with *mild-to-moderate* hearing difficulty, they can provide real, affordable help that simply wasn't available a few years ago. It's one of the better developments in senior-friendly technology in a long while.

CHAPTER 3

The Kinds of Hearing Help

“Hearing help” now covers a range of options, from inexpensive gadgets to proper prescription aids. Knowing the landscape helps you find the right fit for your situation and budget.

The main options

Option	What it is / rough cost
OTC hearing aids	Real hearing aids, no prescription, for mild-to-moderate loss. Roughly a few hundred to ~$1,000.
AirPods Pro (hearing feature)	Earbuds with an FDA-authorized hearing-aid mode. Around $250; need a recent iPhone.
Prescription hearing aids	Fitted by an audiologist; best for greater loss or dexterity needs. Typically $1,500–$2,500+.
Personal amplifiers (PSAPs)	Simple 'louder' devices, NOT regulated hearing aids. Cheap, basic, limited.
Assistive gadgets	TV listeners, captioned phones, amplified phones — help in specific situations.

HEADS UP

“Amplifiers” are not the same as hearing aids

Be careful with very cheap “hearing amplifiers” or “sound amplifiers” (PSAPs) advertised online — these are **not** regulated hearing aids. They simply make *everything* louder, including background noise, and can even be too loud. For real help, look for **“OTC hearing aid”** (a regulated term) or a prescription aid — not just an “amplifier.” The wording matters, and we'll help you tell them apart.

CHAPTER 4

When to See a Professional First

This is the most important chapter in the guide, so please read it carefully. The new affordable options are wonderful for *mild-to-moderate* hearing loss — but some hearing situations need a doctor or audiologist first, and no gadget should come before your health.

See a professional (not a store-bought device) if…

- Your hearing loss came on **suddenly**, or is much worse in **one ear** than the other — see a doctor promptly.
- You have **pain, drainage, ringing, or dizziness** in your ears.
- Your hearing loss is **severe** — you struggle even in quiet, one-on-one conversation.
- You have **difficulty with your hands** that would make tiny controls hard — a professional can fit something suitable.
- You simply want a **proper hearing test** and expert guidance — always a good idea.

STAY SAFE

Some hearing changes are a medical matter — don't self-treat those

Please take this to heart: sudden hearing loss, loss in just one ear, or ear pain, drainage, or dizziness can signal a medical problem that needs a doctor's attention — sometimes urgently. An OTC device is not the answer for those; a doctor is. OTC hearing aids and the AirPods feature are designed only for **adults with perceived mild-to-moderate** hearing difficulty. When in doubt, get your hearing checked by a professional first. Your health comes before any gadget, always.

FROM BILL

I help with the tech — and I'll always send you to the right expert

Let me be clear about my role: I can help you choose, set up, and use hearing technology — that's the tech side I know. But I'm not a hearing professional, and I'll never pretend to be. For your actual hearing health, a proper test, or anything that seems medical, I'll always encourage you to see an audiologist or your doctor. Think of me as your help with the gadgets, working alongside the real hearing experts. Call (330) 200-8042 anytime for the tech part.

CHAPTER 4a

Signs Your Hearing May Be Slipping

Hearing loss usually creeps in so gradually that we don't notice — we just start finding the world a little harder to follow. Recognizing the signs is the first step toward doing something about it.

Common signs to notice

- You often ask people to **repeat themselves**, or say “what?” a lot.
- Others say the **TV or radio is too loud** at your comfortable volume.
- **Conversations in noisy places** — restaurants, gatherings — are a real strain.
- You have trouble on the **telephone**, or hearing **women's and children's voices** (higher pitches).
- You find yourself **avoiding** social situations because following along is tiring.

GOOD TO KNOW

Hearing loss is gradual — others often notice before you do

Because it comes on so slowly, you may not realize how much you're missing — family often notices first (“why's the TV so loud?”, “you didn't hear me again”). If loved ones have mentioned it, or you recognize yourself in the signs above, that's worth taking seriously — not as bad news, but as a chance to get help that really works these days. A hearing check is a simple, wise next step.

CHAPTER 4b

Why Addressing Hearing Loss Matters

It's tempting to just “get by” with hearing trouble — to turn the TV up, nod along, let it slide. But addressing it genuinely matters, for more than just hearing better, and it's worth understanding why.

Why not to just ‘get by’

- **Staying connected** — untreated hearing loss can quietly pull people away from conversations, family, and the activities they love.
- **Safety** — hearing alarms, traffic, doorbells, and warnings keeps you safe.
- **Less strain and fatigue** — straining to hear all day is genuinely tiring; good hearing eases that.
- **Wellbeing** — health experts increasingly link addressing hearing loss to staying mentally and socially engaged.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Hearing well is about staying fully in your life

Addressing hearing loss isn't vanity or fuss — it's about staying fully present in your own life: in the dinner-table laughter, the phone calls with far-off family, the sermon, the grandchild's whispered secret. The new affordable tools make that more possible than ever. Looking into it is an act of staying connected to the people and world you love, and that's always worth it.

FROM BILL

No pressure — just a friendly nudge to look into it

I'm not here to push you — but if hearing has been a struggle, I'd gently encourage you to look into the options now that they're so much more affordable. Start with a hearing check from a professional, and I'm glad to help with any technology side of it. There's real, accessible help available today, and you deserve to hear the people you love. Call (330) 200-8042 if I can help with the tech part.

PART 2

Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids

The affordable, no-prescription option: what OTC hearing aids are, who they suit, how to choose one, what they cost, and the all-important trial period.

CHAPTER 5

What OTC Hearing Aids Are

Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids are genuine, regulated hearing aids you can buy **without a prescription or a specialist fitting** — from a pharmacy, electronics store, or online. They became available after a 2022 rule change, and they've made hearing help far more affordable and accessible.

The key facts

- **For mild-to-moderate loss** — the trouble many people have hearing in noise or softer speech, not profound deafness.
- **No prescription needed** — buy them like any other product, try them at home.
- **Far cheaper** — commonly a few hundred dollars to around a thousand per pair, versus thousands for prescription aids.
- **You adjust them yourself**, usually through a phone app or onboard controls.

GOOD TO KNOW

Real hearing aids — just without the gatekeeper

The important thing to understand: OTC hearing aids are **actual hearing aids**, regulated as medical devices — not toys or mere amplifiers. The 2022 change simply removed the requirement to go through a specialist to buy them, for adults with mild-to-moderate loss. So you're getting real hearing help, at a fraction of the traditional cost and hassle. That's the genuine breakthrough here.

CHAPTER 6

Are OTC Aids Right for You?

OTC aids suit many people beautifully — and aren't right for others. Here's an honest way to tell where you fall, though a real hearing test is always the gold standard.

OTC aids may suit you if…

- You have trouble hearing in **noisy places** or catching **softer speech**, but manage okay in quiet.
- You turn the **TV up** more than others like, or often ask people to repeat themselves.
- You're comfortable using a **phone app** to adjust them (or have help doing so).
- Your hearing loss is in **both ears** and came on *gradually*.

Consider a professional instead if…

— any of the warning signs from Chapter 4 apply (sudden loss, one ear, pain, severe loss), or if you'd simply feel more confident with an expert's test and fitting. There's no shame in starting with a professional; it's often the wisest path.

TIP

A free or low-cost hearing check is a great first step

Before buying anything, consider getting your hearing checked — many clinics, and even some pharmacies and online tools, offer **free or low-cost hearing screenings**. Knowing roughly where your hearing stands helps you choose wisely and confirms whether OTC is appropriate for you. It's a sensible, no-pressure first step that takes the guesswork out of the whole decision.

CHAPTER 7

Choosing an OTC Hearing Aid

There are many OTC models now, which is wonderful but can be overwhelming. A few things to weigh will help you choose one you'll be happy with.

What to consider

Consider	Why it matters
Style	Tiny in-ear buds, or behind-the-ear models. Behind-the-ear are often easier to handle.
Rechargeable vs. battery	Rechargeable (set in a case overnight) avoids fiddly tiny batteries — easier for many.
App control	Most adjust via a phone app; some have simple onboard buttons too.
Self-fitting test	Better models include a hearing test in their app to tune them to your ears.
Reputable brand	Stick to known names and sellers with good support and a return policy.

TIP

Rechargeable and behind-the-ear are often friendlier choices

If handling tiny things is a challenge, two features make life much easier: **rechargeable** aids (you just set them in a charging case overnight — no wrestling with watch-battery-sized cells), and **behind-the-ear** styles (a bit larger and easier to grip and position). They may cost a touch more, but the daily ease is well worth it for many folks. Comfort of use matters as much as the sound.

CHAPTER 8

Cost and the Trial Period

Two practical points can make or break your experience with OTC aids: understanding the real cost, and making full use of the **return/trial period** — which matters enormously with hearing aids.

The money and the trial

- **Cost** — OTC aids commonly run from a couple hundred to around a thousand dollars a pair; far less than the $1,500–$2,500+ of prescription aids.
- **A return period is essential** — reputable sellers offer a trial (often 30–45 days) to return them if they don't work for you. Only buy ones that do.
- **Hearing aids take getting used to** — your brain needs a few weeks to adjust, so give them an honest try before deciding.

HEADS UP

Only buy from a seller with a real return policy

This is crucial with hearing aids: **only buy from a seller offering a genuine trial/return period** (30 days or more). Hearing aids are personal — what suits one person doesn't suit another — and you truly cannot know until you've worn them for a couple of weeks in your real life. A good return policy lets you try risk-free. Avoid any seller who won't take them back; that's a red flag.

FROM BILL

Overwhelmed by the choices? Let's narrow it down

The sheer number of OTC hearing aids can be paralyzing. While I'm not a hearing professional, I'm glad to help you sort through the *technology* side — understanding the features, the apps, the return policies — so you can make a confident choice (and I'll steer you to a hearing check for the medical side). Call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll make the decision feel manageable.

CHAPTER 8a

OTC Aids or AirPods — Which to Try?

If you're weighing the two affordable options — OTC hearing aids or the AirPods Pro feature — here's a plain comparison to help you lean one way. Both serve mild-to-moderate loss; they suit different people and uses.

A side-by-side look

If you want…	Lean toward…
All-day wear	OTC aids — built for it, with better battery life for continuous use.
Part-time / discreet use	AirPods — pop in for a meal, TV, or chat; look like ordinary earbuds.
If you don't have an iPhone	OTC aids — AirPods need a recent iPhone/iPad.
If you already own AirPods Pro	Try the AirPods feature first — it's free to turn on.
Dedicated hearing device feel	OTC aids — designed solely for hearing, often fit more securely.

TIP

Already have AirPods Pro and an iPhone? Try that first — it's free

Here's an easy starting point: if you **already own AirPods Pro 2 or 3 and a recent iPhone**, turning on the hearing feature costs nothing — so try it first and see how much it helps. If it's enough, wonderful; if you need something for all-day wear or a more dedicated device, OTC aids are the next step. Starting with what you already have, at no cost, is a sensible, risk-free way to begin.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can always start one way and change course

Remember there's no permanent commitment here. Thanks to trial/return periods and the AirPods feature being free to try, you can start with whichever appeals, give it a fair few weeks, and switch to the other (or to a professional fitting) if it's not quite right. Hearing help is a journey of finding what works for *you* — and the affordable options make trying low-risk. Don't fret about picking perfectly; just begin.

PART 3

AirPods as Hearing Aids

The feature that surprised everyone: Apple's AirPods Pro can work as FDA-authorized hearing aids. What it is, who it suits, and how to set it up with the built-in hearing test.

CHAPTER 9

The AirPods Hearing-Aid Feature

In a genuinely remarkable development, Apple's **AirPods Pro** earbuds now include an **FDA-authorized hearing-aid feature**. That means a device millions of people already own — or might happily buy for music and calls anyway — can double as real hearing help for mild-to-moderate loss.

What it is

- **Built into AirPods Pro** (the Pro 2 and Pro 3 models) — a software feature, authorized by the FDA as a hearing aid.
- **For mild-to-moderate loss** — the same range OTC aids serve.
- **Includes a hearing test** you take yourself in the iPhone's Health app, which then tunes the AirPods to your ears.
- **No extra cost** if you already own compatible AirPods Pro — it's a free feature.

GOOD TO KNOW

A hearing aid hiding in a popular everyday gadget

What makes this so appealing is its ordinariness: AirPods are a common, unremarkable thing to wear — no stigma, nothing that looks like a “hearing aid.” So for someone shy about hearing aids, or who wants to dip a toe in, AirPods Pro offer real, FDA-authorized hearing help in a device that looks like what the grandkids wear. For mild-to-moderate loss, it's a clever and dignified option.

CHAPTER 10

Is This Right for You?

The AirPods feature is wonderful for the right person — and has real limitations worth knowing honestly before you rely on it.

It may suit you if…

- You have (or will get) a recent **iPhone or iPad** — it's required to set up and use the feature.
- Your hearing loss is **mild-to-moderate**.
- You want **flexible, discreet** help — pop them in for the dinner party or the TV, take them out otherwise.

Honest limitations

- **Battery life** — AirPods don't last all day as hearing aids; they need recharging, so they're better for *part*-time use than all-waking-hours wear.
- **Fit** — they don't fit as securely or consistently as purpose-built aids for everyone.
- **Not for severe loss** — and not a replacement for a proper evaluation.

TIP

Great for part-time help; less so for all-day wear

Set your expectations rightly and you'll be delighted: AirPods Pro as hearing aids shine for **part-time** situations — a meal out, a conversation, watching TV, a church service — where you pop them in for a few hours. Because the battery doesn't last all day, they're less suited to someone who needs hearing help every waking hour; a dedicated aid suits that better. Match the tool to how you'll use it.

CHAPTER 11

Setting Up the Hearing Feature

Setting up the AirPods hearing feature is done through your iPhone, and it includes a clever self-administered hearing test. Here's the flow; it's guided, and you can take your time.

The setup steps

1. Make sure your **iPhone (or iPad) is updated** to a recent version, and your **AirPods Pro** are connected.
2. Open **Settings** and tap your **AirPods** at the top (with them in or nearby), or open the **Health** app and look for **Hearing**.
3. Find the **Hearing Aid / Hearing Health** setup and choose to take the **Hearing Test**.
4. **Take the test in a quiet room** — you'll tap when you hear tones, like a hearing test at the doctor. It takes a few minutes.
5. The AirPods are then **tuned to your results**, and the hearing-aid feature turns on. You can adjust it anytime.

TIP

Take the hearing test in a genuinely quiet room

The self-test is only accurate if it's quiet, so pick a **truly quiet room** — no TV, no fan, no traffic noise — and a time when you won't be interrupted. A good, careful test gives the AirPods the right settings to help you well. If it's noisy, the results will be off. Treat it like the real hearing test it is: calm, quiet, unhurried.

FROM BILL

Setting up AirPods hearing mode is a lovely thing to do together

The AirPods hearing setup is genuinely clever but has a few steps — updating the iPhone, the test, the adjustments — that are far easier with a patient helper the first time. If you've got AirPods Pro and an iPhone and want to try this, call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll set it up carefully together. (And do get a proper hearing check too, for the medical side.)

PART 4

Other Hearing Helpers

Hearing aids aren't the only tools. Devices and features that help in specific situations — the TV, the phone, noisy rooms — often alongside or instead of aids.

CHAPTER 12

Hearing the TV Better

Struggling with the TV is one of the most common hearing complaints — and one of the most fixable, with several good options beyond just turning it up (which rarely helps with *clarity*).

Ways to hear the TV clearly

- **Captions/subtitles** — free, built into every TV; shows the words on screen (see the Smart TVs manual). A simple, excellent first step.
- **A TV "clear voice" / dialogue mode** — in the TV's sound settings, boosts speech over music and effects.
- **A TV listening device** — wireless headphones or a neck-worn speaker that sends the TV's sound right to your ears at your own volume, without blasting the room.
- **Your hearing aids or AirPods** — some stream the TV's sound directly to them.

> **TIP**
>
> **Captions plus a clear-voice setting often solves TV trouble for free**
>
> Before buying anything, try two free fixes together: turn on **captions** and switch on your TV's **"clear voice" or dialogue mode**. For many people, that combination — seeing the words *and* hearing speech boosted over the background — solves TV frustration entirely, at no cost. If you still struggle, a TV listening device is a great next step. Start with the free options.

CHAPTER 13

Hearing on the Phone Better

The telephone is another common struggle, and there are excellent, often **free**, solutions — including special captioned phones designed exactly for this.

Phone options

- **Captioned phones** — phones that show written captions of what the caller says, like subtitles for your call. Often **free** through federal programs for those with hearing loss.
- **Amplified phones** — phones with extra-loud, clear sound and big buttons.
- **Your smartphone's features** — volume boost, and some phones show live captions of calls.
- **Hearing aids / AirPods** — can route call audio directly to your ears.

GOOD TO KNOW

Captioned phones may be free — worth asking about

A genuinely helpful and underused option: **captioned telephones**, which display written captions of what your caller is saying as they speak. For people with documented hearing loss, these are often provided **free** through federally funded programs. If phone calls are a struggle, it's well worth asking a hearing professional or searching for “captioned phone” programs — real help that may cost nothing.

CHAPTER 14

Hearing in Noisy Places

Restaurants, family gatherings, church halls — noisy places are the hardest for anyone with hearing trouble, even with good aids. A few strategies and tools genuinely help.

Strategies and tools

- **Position yourself well** — back to the wall, facing the people you want to hear, away from the kitchen or speakers.
- **Hearing aids / AirPods with a "conversation" or noise-reducing mode** — focus on speech in front of you and dial down background din.
- **A remote microphone** — a small mic you place near the person you most want to hear (across a restaurant table), sending their voice to your aids.
- **Ask for help** — a quieter table, people facing you, no shame in it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Rejoining the conversation you'd been missing

Noisy gatherings are exactly where hearing trouble isolates people most — and where the right tool and a little strategy can bring you back into the fun. To catch the jokes at the family dinner, follow the chat at coffee hour, be part of things again rather than smiling and nodding — that's a real gift. These helpers are about reconnection, not just volume.

FROM BILL

Let's set up the right helper for your toughest situation

Everyone's hardest hearing moment is different — the TV, the phone, the restaurant, church. Tell me yours, and I'll help you find and set up the right technology for it — captions, a TV listener, a captioned phone, a remote mic. And I'll always point you to a hearing professional for the medical side. Call (330) 200-8042 and we'll target what frustrates you most.

CHAPTER 14a

Alerts You Can See and Feel

Beyond hearing conversations, there's the matter of catching the **alerts** around your home — the doorbell, the smoke alarm, the phone, a timer. For anyone with hearing loss, devices that alert you by **sight or touch** add real safety and peace of mind.

Visual and vibrating alerts

- **Flashing-light alerts** — doorbells and alarms that flash a light (or flash your smart lights — see the Smart Lights manual) when they go off.
- **Vibrating alerts** — a bed-shaker for the alarm clock or smoke alarm, or a vibrating wristband.
- **Phone-on-the-screen alerts** — your smartphone can flash and vibrate for calls and alarms.
- **Louder, lower-pitched alarms** — special smoke alarms designed to be easier to hear.

STAY SAFE

Make sure you'll wake to a smoke alarm

One safety point worth acting on: if you're not sure you'd **hear a smoke alarm** while asleep (especially without your hearing aids in), look into alarms with **strobe lights and bed-shakers** made exactly for this. It's a genuine safety matter — a standard beeping alarm may not wake someone with hearing loss. This is one place the technology isn't a convenience but a real protection. Please don't overlook it.

FROM BILL

Let's make sure your home's alerts reach you

Setting up visual and vibrating alerts — a flashing doorbell, a bed-shaker alarm, smart lights that flash when the doorbell rings — is exactly the kind of practical, safety-minded technology I love helping folks with. If catching the doorbell or waking to an alarm is a concern, call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll make sure your home's important alerts reach you reliably.

PART 5

Getting Used to Them

Hearing devices take adjustment — for your ears, your brain, and your fingers. How to start gently, adjust the settings, and give yourself the best chance of success.

CHAPTER 15

Starting Gently

Here's something many people don't know, and it causes a lot of needless disappointment: hearing aids (and the AirPods feature) take **time to get used to**. Your brain has to relearn sounds it's been missing. Starting gently makes all the difference.

Easing in

1. **Start at home, in quiet,** for an hour or two a day — not all day in a noisy place on day one.
2. **Get used to everyday sounds** — your own voice, the refrigerator hum, footsteps. They'll seem loud at first; that's normal.
3. **Build up gradually** — a little longer each day, adding more challenging situations as you adjust.
4. **Give it a few weeks** before judging — most people's brains adapt, and sounds settle into feeling natural.

GOOD TO KNOW

Everything sounding “too loud” at first is normal — and temporary

When you first wear hearing help, ordinary sounds — your own voice, dishes, paper rustling — can seem startlingly loud or sharp. This is completely normal and almost always **temporary**: your brain has been missing those sounds and needs a few weeks to re-adjust to hearing them again. Don't give up in the first days because it feels strange. Ease in gently, and it settles into feeling natural. Patience is the secret to success.

CHAPTER 16

Adjusting the Settings

Modern hearing devices are adjustable — usually through a phone app — so you can tune them to your comfort and different situations. A little tinkering helps you get the best from them.

What you can usually adjust

- **Overall volume** — louder or softer to taste.
- **Programs/modes** — presets for quiet, noisy places, TV, music.
- **Tone/balance** — more or less of the high sounds (for clarity) or low sounds.
- **Re-run the hearing test** — to re-tune them to your ears if things change.

TIP

Learn the “noisy place” mode — you'll use it most

Of all the settings, the one worth learning is the **“noisy place” or “restaurant” mode**, which helps focus on speech and cut background din — because noisy rooms are where you'll want the most help. Practice switching to it in the app (or by a tap on the device) before you need it, so it's second nature at the family dinner. A little familiarity makes the hard situations much easier.

CHAPTER 17

Giving Yourself the Best Chance

A few habits and mindsets greatly improve your odds of success with hearing technology. People who follow these are far more likely to stick with their devices and be glad they did.

Keys to success

- **Wear them regularly** — consistency helps your brain adapt; occasional use keeps it feeling strange.
- **Be patient and kind to yourself** — adjustment takes weeks, not days.
- **Use the trial period** — if after a real try they're not right, return and try something else.
- **Ask for help** — with the app, the settings, the fit; you don't have to figure it all out alone.
- **Tell people you're adjusting** — ask them to face you and speak clearly while you get used to things.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Stick with it, and the world opens back up

The people who give hearing help a fair, patient chance — wearing it regularly through the adjustment weeks — are so often the ones who say, months later, that they can't imagine going back. Rejoining conversations, enjoying the TV, hearing birdsong and grandchildren again — it's worth pushing through the awkward first weeks. Give yourself that gift of patience.

FROM BILL

Struggling to adjust? Let's troubleshoot the tech together

If you've got hearing devices but they're not feeling right — the app's confusing, the settings seem off, they're uncomfortable — don't just give up and leave them in a drawer. Many of those troubles are fixable on the technology side. Call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll work through the settings and setup together (and if it's a fit or medical issue, I'll point you to a hearing professional).

CHAPTER 17a

Helping a Loved One Hear Better

Perhaps you're reading this for someone else — a spouse or parent whose hearing is fading, who may be reluctant to admit it or do anything about it. Helping them takes a gentle, patient touch, and it makes a world of difference.

How to help, kindly

- **Raise it gently and without blame** — “I've noticed these new affordable options; want to look together?” beats “you never listen.”
- **Go with them** to a hearing check, and help with the technology side.
- **Be patient during their adjustment** — face them, speak clearly (not louder), cut background noise.
- **Celebrate small wins** — encouragement helps them stick with it through the awkward early weeks.

TIP

Speak clearly and face them — it helps more than shouting

When talking with someone who's hard of hearing, the instinct is to **shout** — but that often distorts speech and feels unkind. Instead: **face them** so they see your lips, **speak clearly and a bit slower** (not just louder), **get their attention first**, and **reduce background noise** (turn down the TV). These small courtesies help enormously, and they're kinder than raising your voice. Good habits for the whole family.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Your patience is part of their success

A loved one adjusting to hearing help does far better with a patient, encouraging family around them — people who face them, speak clearly, and cheer the small victories. Your kindness through the awkward early weeks can be the difference between hearing aids that change their life and ones that end up in a drawer. Helping someone hear again is a real gift of love, and your patience is a big part of it.

CHAPTER 17b

Comfort, Glasses, and Everyday Fit

A few practical comfort matters come up with hearing devices — wearing them with glasses, getting the fit right, and keeping them comfortable all day. Small things, but they affect whether you actually wear them.

Everyday comfort tips

- **With glasses:** behind-the-ear devices share space with glasses arms — put glasses on first, then the hearing device, and it usually settles fine.
- **The right ear-tip size** — most in-ear devices come with several tip sizes; the right one is comfortable and seals well (reducing whistling).
- **Give your ears breaks** at first if they get tired, building up wear time gradually.
- **Comfort improves with habit** — like new glasses or shoes, they feel more natural with time.

TIP

The right ear-tip size fixes both comfort and whistling

If a device is uncomfortable *or* whistles, the usual culprit is the wrong **ear-tip size**. Most come with small, medium, and large tips — try them until one feels snug but comfortable and stops the whistling (which comes from a loose seal). Getting the tip right transforms the experience from “I can't stand these” to “I forget I'm wearing them.” It's worth the few minutes of experimenting.

FROM BILL

Fit and comfort troubles? A hearing pro and I can both help

If a hearing device just won't get comfortable, some of that is technology (tip sizes, settings) that I can help with, and some is a fitting matter best handled by a hearing professional. Don't suffer with an uncomfortable device or give up on it — call me at (330) 200-8042 for the tech side, and I'll point you to a pro for the fit. Comfortable enough to actually wear is the whole goal.

PART 6

Living With Them

Day-to-day life with hearing devices: charging and care, handling them with ease, using them with your phone and TV, and fixing the common little troubles.

CHAPTER 18

Charging, Batteries & Daily Care

A little daily routine keeps your hearing devices working their best and lasting for years. It quickly becomes second nature, like charging a phone.

The daily care routine

- **Charge them nightly** (for rechargeable ones) — set them in their case overnight so they're ready each morning. Or keep spare batteries handy for battery models.
- **Keep them dry** — take them out before showering, swimming, or heavy sweating; store them in their case.
- **Wipe them gently** — a soft dry cloth; keep the little sound openings clear of earwax (there are tiny tools for this).
- **Store safely** — in their case, away from pets (who love to chew them) and little hands.

TIP

Charge them where you charge your phone — build the habit together

The easiest way to never be caught with dead hearing aids: charge them in the **same spot, at the same time** you charge your phone — on the nightstand each night. Tying the new habit to one you already have makes it automatic. Rechargeable devices especially reward this simple routine with reliable, all-ready mornings. A little consistency, no fuss.

CHAPTER 19

Using Them with Your Phone and TV

A lovely bonus of modern hearing devices (and AirPods) is that they connect to your phone and sometimes your TV, letting sound come *directly* to your ears — crystal clear, at your own volume.

What they can connect to

- **Phone calls** — hear the caller right in your ears, clearly, hands-free.
- **Music, podcasts, audiobooks** — stream straight from your phone.
- **The TV** — some devices (and extra gadgets) send the TV's sound directly to your ears.
- **Adjustments** — your phone app controls volume and settings on the fly.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Phone calls and TV, piped clearly into your ears

Having a phone call come directly into your hearing devices — clear, at just your volume, no holding the phone to a struggling ear — can transform the telephone from a frustration back into a pleasure. The same with the TV's dialogue streamed right to you. It's like personal, private sound tuned exactly for your ears. A genuine quality-of-life boost that comes built into the better modern devices.

CHAPTER 20

Common Troubles and Fixes

When a hearing device acts up, the cause is usually simple — and often not a fault at all. Run through these before worrying.

Everyday fixes

Trouble	Try this
Quiet or no sound	Check it's charged; clean the earwax from the sound opening; check the volume.
Whistling / feedback	Reseat it snugly in your ear; earwax or a loose fit is usually the cause.
Won't connect to phone	Turn the device off and on; check Bluetooth; re-pair in the app.
Uncomfortable	Check the fit and ear-tip size; try a different tip; give your ears time to adjust.
Short battery life	Normal with heavy streaming; charge fully; batteries weaken over years.

TIP

Earwax is the #1 cause of a ‘broken’ hearing aid

Before you fear a hearing device has failed, **check for earwax** blocking its tiny sound opening — it's by far the most common cause of a quiet or dead-seeming aid. Gently clean it with the little brush or tool that came with it (and keep the openings clear as a habit). Nine times out of ten, a “broken” hearing aid just needs a quick clean. A simple thing that saves a lot of worry.

FROM BILL

Hearing device acting up? Let's check the simple things first

If your hearing aids or AirPods are misbehaving, don't assume they're ruined — call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll run through the simple fixes together: charging, cleaning, reconnecting to your phone, the settings. These small troubles are usually quick to sort out on the technology side. (And for a fit or ear issue, I'll point you to a hearing professional.)

PART 7

Professionals, Costs & Avoiding Scams

When an audiologist is the right call, how insurance and Medicare fit in, and — importantly — the hearing-aid scams and high-pressure sales to steer well clear of.

CHAPTER 21

When an Audiologist Is Worth It

OTC options are wonderful, but a hearing professional — an **audiologist** — offers things no store-bought device can, and for many people is well worth the cost. Here's when that expertise really pays off.

An audiologist is especially valuable if…

- Your hearing loss is **more than mild-to-moderate**, or you're not sure how bad it is.
- You want a **proper hearing test** and a professional recommendation.
- You have **trouble with your hands or eyes** that makes self-fitting hard.
- OTC options **haven't worked** well for you.
- You simply want **expert fitting and ongoing support** — worth a lot with hearing aids.

GOOD TO KNOW

It needn't be either/or

Don't think of it as OTC *versus* a professional — the two work together. A great approach for many is to get a proper **hearing test** from an audiologist (so you truly know your hearing), and *then* decide — with their input — whether an affordable OTC device, the AirPods feature, or a fitted prescription aid best suits you. The test is knowledge; it makes every next choice wiser, whichever way you go.

CHAPTER 22

Insurance, Medicare & Saving Money

Cost is a real factor with hearing help, so let's be honest about how insurance fits in — and the ways to keep costs down.

The money landscape

- **Original Medicare generally does not cover hearing aids** — an unhappy fact, though it covers some diagnostic tests.
- **Some Medicare Advantage plans** and private insurance *do* offer hearing benefits — worth checking yours.
- **OTC aids and AirPods** are far cheaper than prescription aids, which is much of their appeal.
- **Veterans** may be eligible for hearing aids through the VA — well worth asking.

TIP

Check your specific plan — and ask about the VA if you served

Hearing benefits vary a lot, so it's worth a phone call to your own **insurance or Medicare Advantage plan** to ask exactly what hearing help they cover — some cover more than people expect. And if you're a **veteran**, the VA often provides hearing aids and care; many veterans don't realize they're eligible. A few questions could save you a great deal. (I can't advise on benefits, but I can encourage you to ask the right places.)

CHAPTER 23

Avoiding Hearing-Aid Scams

Sadly, hearing loss attracts scammers and high-pressure sellers who prey on people eager to hear better. A little awareness keeps your money safe. (The Scams manual in this series goes deeper.)

Red flags to watch for

- **Miracle "cures" or absurdly cheap "hearing aids"** advertised online — often useless amplifiers or outright scams.
- **High-pressure sales** — "today only," "sign now," big discounts that vanish if you leave to think.
- **No trial period or return policy** — a serious warning sign.
- **"Free" offers that demand your card** or personal details, or robocalls about hearing aids.
- **Unsolicited calls or ads** pushing you to buy or "claim" something.

SCAM ALERT

No legitimate seller pressures you or skips the trial period

Real, reputable hearing-aid sellers let you take your time, offer a genuine return period, and never pressure you to buy on the spot. So treat **urgency, "today only" discounts, no-return policies, and unsolicited calls** as the warning signs they are. If an offer rushes you or seems too good to be true, walk away and check with a trusted person first. Your hearing deserves a careful, unpressured decision — and your money deserves protection.

FROM BILL

Unsure if a hearing-aid offer is legit? Ask me first

If you come across a hearing-aid deal, ad, or call that seems too good to be true, or that's pressuring you, please run it by me before you spend a penny — (330) 200-8042. I'll help you tell a legitimate option from a scam, and point you to trustworthy routes. There's a lot of predatory selling in this area, and a quick check can save you real money and heartache.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about where I can help — and a one-page cheat-sheet to keep handy.

CHAPTER 24

When to Call Bill (and When to See a Pro)

Let me be clear one more time about how I can help, because with hearing it matters. I help with the **technology**; for your hearing **health**, the right people are doctors and audiologists. Here's the honest dividing line.

Call me for the technology

- Choosing and understanding **OTC hearing aids** or the **AirPods feature** — the gadget side.
- **Setting up** AirPods hearing mode, a device's app, or a TV listener.
- **Connecting** hearing devices to your phone or TV.
- **Troubleshooting** — charging, cleaning, reconnecting, settings.
- Checking whether a hearing-aid **offer is a scam**.

See a professional for the health

- A proper **hearing test** and expert recommendation.
- **Sudden, one-sided, or severe** hearing loss, or ear pain, drainage, or dizziness — see a doctor promptly.
- A **fitting** if you have dexterity or vision challenges.
- Questions about your **hearing health** generally.

FROM BILL

How I like to help

I'm Bill, and I've spent 30+ years helping folks feel at home with their technology, right here in Portage County, Ohio. With hearing help, I'll happily take the fiddly technology off your plate — setup, apps, connecting things, troubleshooting — and I'll always, always point you to a hearing professional for the medical side. No rushing, no talking down, no question too small. Call **(330) 200-8042** or book at **billshometech.com/book**.

STAY SAFE

Your hearing health comes before any gadget

Please remember the one firm rule of this whole guide: technology is a wonderful help for mild-to-moderate hearing trouble, but it is never a substitute for proper care when something seems medically wrong. Sudden changes, one-sided loss, pain, or dizziness mean see a doctor — not a store. Treat your ears and your hearing with the same care you'd give any part of your health. The gadgets can wait; your health can't.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about these new, affordable ways to hear better. Hearing well again — rejoining the conversations and the sounds you've been missing — is a wonderful thing, and it's more within reach than ever. Keep this guide handy, be patient with yourself, and don't be a stranger.

— Bill

CHAPTER 25

Your Hearing-Help Cheat-Sheet

Keep this handy. The essentials, all in one place.

Your main options

Option	In brief
OTC hearing aids	No prescription; mild-to-moderate loss; a few hundred to ~$1,000. Get a trial period.
AirPods Pro hearing mode	FDA-authorized; ~$250; needs a recent iPhone; great for part-time use.
Prescription aids	Audiologist-fitted; for greater loss or dexterity needs; costs more.
TV/phone helpers	Captions (free!), captioned phones (often free), TV listeners.

See a doctor — don't self-treat — if

- Hearing loss is **sudden**, or much worse in **one ear**.
- You have **ear pain, drainage, ringing, or dizziness**.
- Your loss is **severe** (trouble even in quiet).

Remember

- **Give devices a few weeks** — adjustment is normal.
- **Earwax** is the #1 cause of a “broken” aid — clean the opening.
- **Only buy with a real return policy**; beware pressure and “miracle” deals.
- **Captions are free** — try them for TV and calls first.

Keep these handy

My details	
My device / brand	_____
My hearing professional	_____
My insurance hearing benefit	_____
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WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Hearing the world again — affordably

The new hearing-help options have put real help within reach of far more people, at far less cost than before. With a little patience and the right choice for you, rejoining conversations and enjoying the sounds of life is genuinely possible. Be proud of looking into it, lean on the professionals for your health and me for the tech, and here's to hearing the people you love clearly again.

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