

# HEARING PROTECTION DEVICES

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Hearing protection devices (HPD) such as earmuffs and earplugs can be an effective measure to protect hearing in noisy work environments. However, hearing protection devices are only effective if they are properly sized and carefully fitted into or over the ear. The two common HPD categories are earplugs and earmuffs.

There are several common types of hearing protection devices:

- Formable earplugs made of expandable foam. One size fits most people.
- Pre-molded earplugs made from flexible plastics. Often sold in different sizes, they should be selected to provide best fit for each ear.
- Semi-aural devices, or canal caps, consisting of flexible tips on a lightweight headband. They provide less protection than earplugs or earmuffs but may be good for intermittent use.
- Earmuffs having rigid cups with soft plastic cushions that seal around the ears.

The formable foam earplug must be narrowed and compressed by rolling before it is inserted into the ear canal. Once inserted, the earplug expands to fill the ear canal and to reduce noise transmission further into the ear. If it is inserted incorrectly, the foam earplug will provide much less protection against noise.

To properly fit a formable foam earplug:

1. With clean hands, slowly roll and compress a foam earplug into a very thin cylinder.
2. Reach around the head with one hand to pull the top of the ear slightly outward and upward while inserting an earplug into the ear canal with the other hand.
3. After insertion, hold foam earplugs in place with a fingertip for a few moments to ensure that the plug expands in the ear canal without moving out of the ear. In a noisy environment, the reduction in perceived sound level as the plug expands should be noticeable.
4. Have a coworker visually check the earplug.

If the half or more of the earplug is sticking out of the ear canal, it not fitted correctly and won't provide the designed protection.

**Contact your manager immediately if replacement hearing protection is needed.**

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