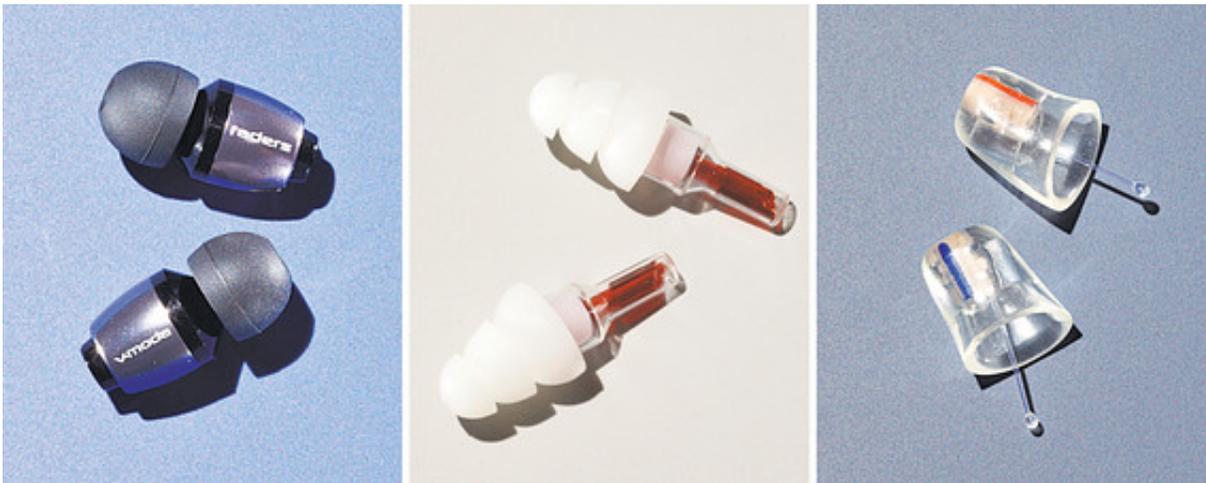


Protect Your Hearing With Earplugs That Rock

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From left: V-Moda Faders VIP, Etymotic ETY Plugs ER20 and Earasers Musicians Plugs F. Martin Ramin/The Wall Street Journal (3)

IF YOU PLAN ON hitting a string of summer concerts this season, invest in a great pair of earplugs. Unlike standard foam models, which muffle as much as they mute, high-fidelity plugs dial down tones more evenly across the spectrum. Live music sounds quieter, but not distant.

This type of earplug also lowers the volume less drastically than foam versions—by 12dB instead of around 30dB. According to Dr. Cory Portnuff, an audiologist at the University of Colorado Hospital who has done extensive research in music-induced hearing loss in teens and young adults, that 12dB reduction should be enough for casual concert-goers. "You don't always need the maximum protection," he said, adding that how long you're exposed to loud sounds is just as important as the volume. More protection would be warranted at an all-day music festival, he said, or at extremely loud concerts—those at which you have to shout to be heard by someone standing an arm's distance away.

As with all earplugs, these models only protect your hearing when worn properly. Dr. Portnuff suggested a simple test: Say the words "boom" and "beat" while wearing the

earplugs. If "boom" sounds louder to you than "beat" in either ear, the earplug needs to be pushed farther in. (This works because of a phenomenon known as the occlusion effect.)

We tested three high-fidelity earplugs at the Bowery Ballroom, a venue in New York City. Each had distinct acoustic quirks, but we'd be hard-pressed to say one was superior to another. Besides, the sound will vary depending on how well the earplugs fit in your ear canal. We recommend going with the model whose form you're most comfortable wearing, but here's how each performed under high levels of sound pressure.

Easiest to Fit: V-Moda Faders VIP. With the same look and shape as standard earbuds, these are the quickest to pop in and out of your ears. Each pair includes four sets of silicone tips in various sizes, greatly simplifying the process of getting a comfortable fit. To our ears, the Faders VIP offered the most pronounced volume reduction, but likewise cut high frequencies most drastically, too. \$20, v-moda.com^[1]

Most Ubiquitous: Etymotic ETY Plugs ER20. These triple-flange earplugs take some practice to seat properly in your ear (tip: tug the top of your ear up as you insert), but they have a pleasingly bright high end. They're also among the easiest to purchase: They're being sold at a few large concert venues this summer, and are distributed under a number of different brand names, including Hearos, Vic Firth and Earlove. \$13, etymotic.com^[2]

Most Discreet: Earasers Musicians Plugs. If you're concerned that your friends will look at you funny for wearing earplugs, this minuscule model, made of clear medical-grade silicone, is your best bet. Earasers sit almost entirely inside the ear canal, making them all but invisible. We found that their soft silicone construction was the most comfortable to wear for extended periods. Their only drawback is that they come in three sizes that vary quite dramatically, which could make it hard to find the perfect fit. If yours aren't snug, the manufacturer will exchange them for a different size. \$50, earasers.net^[3]

1. <http://v-moda.com/>
2. <http://www.etymotic.com/Default.aspx>
3. <http://www.earasers.net/>

