

NOISE AT WORK:

Types of ear protection



String ear plugs



Pros:

- ✓ **Preferred for food handlers:** Safer around food as they limit risk of falling in food and are easier to see if they do.
- ✓ Some versions allow speech and filter loud noises making communicating with staff and customers easier than the solid variety.
- ✓ Can reuse the hard plastic ones.
- ✓ Cleanable if hard plastic.
- ✓ Cheap

Cons:

- ✗ Food handlers must wash their hands each time after touching ear plugs / ear area.
- ✗ Foam ones are not cleanable.

Disposable earplugs



These are usually made from foam, wax or silicone.

Pros:

- ✓ Widely available, cheap and fit everyone with reasonably comfortable
- ✓ provide good attenuation if put in properly – up to 30dB.
- ✓ With care, and if kept clean, they can be re-used – however foam is difficult to clean.
- ✓ They must be thrown away if they are dirty or distorted.

Cons:

- ✗ Not good for being able to hear customers or colleagues speak as they block ears so sound cannot get through.
- ✗ Increase frequency of touching ears and plugs to remove to hear speech.
- ✗ Must wash hands after touching.
- ✗ Not for use around food: Easily dropped in food.
- ✗ Loss of sound clarity in mid and high frequencies.

Prices start from around £1 per pair if bought individually.

Reusable



Pros:

- ✓ Hard materials with silicone plug, often supplied with different sizes of silicone for comfort and better fit.
- ✓ Easy to clean.
- ✓ “Built to last”.
- ✓ “Stylish”.
- ✓ High fidelity sound – filter loud sounds and keep speech clear.
- ✓ C.24dB SNR depending on brand.

Cons:

- ✗ Can drop into food, but connecting neck chains can be purchased to prevent dropping.
- ✗ Must wash hands after touch before touching food
- ✗ More expensive to replace if lost.

Ear defenders



Pros:

- ✓ Not touching ear, reducing hygiene risks.
- ✓ Greater noise reduction.
- ✓ Easy to use.

Cons:

- ✗ Harder to hear speech and communicate as block all sound.
- ✗ More expensive.

FACTORS	EAR DEFENDERS	EARPLUGS
Noise reduction (potential and typical)	✓	✓
Comfort in hot environments	✗	✓
Compatibility with other PPE	✓	✓
Ease of correct use	✓	✗