

# Billings Audiologist Cautions Over the Counter Hearing Aid Risks While Advancing Safer Hearing Care

*A Billings audiologist explains why professional hearing tests and properly fitted hearing aids offer safer, clearer, and longer lasting hearing care.*

BILLINGS, MT, UNITED STATES, January 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dr. Tracy Hayden of [Big Sky Audiology Clinic](#) of Billings, Montana is raising awareness about the growing use of over-the-counter and direct-to-consumer hearing aids and the potential risks they pose when used without professional guidance.



As hearing aids become more accessible through online and retail channels, many individuals are skipping a comprehensive hearing test and professional hearing aid evaluation. According to Dr. Hayden, this trend can lead to serious long-term consequences for hearing health.

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I see patients in Billings every week who tried OTC hearing aids and struggled. A proper hearing test and personalized care help hearing aids work the way they're meant to.”

*Dr. Tracy Hayden, AuD.*

One of the most common issues with OTC hearing aids is under amplification. When speech and environmental sounds are not amplified accurately, the auditory system does not receive enough stimulation. Over time, this can result in reduced speech clarity, declining word recognition, and increased listening effort that leaves individuals feeling fatigued and frustrated.

The opposite risk is also common. Many OTC devices lack proper output limiters, which means loud sounds can exceed safe levels. Over amplification increases the risk of additional hearing loss, sound distortion, and worsening tinnitus. Without professional programming, users may unknowingly damage their remaining hearing.

Another major concern is the absence of [experienced diagnostic](#) testing. A professional hearing test performed by a Billings audiologist is designed not only to measure hearing levels but also to identify potential medical conditions. These can include tumors, sudden or asymmetrical hearing loss, middle ear disease or infection, Ménière's disease, and vestibular or neurological involvement. OTC hearing aids are not capable of detecting or differentiating these conditions, which can delay proper medical treatment.

Durability is another overlooked factor. Many over the counter devices are built like consumer earbuds rather than medical equipment. They are often not designed for all day wear or long term use. Moisture and earwax can easily cause breakdowns, repairs are usually not possible, and most devices are not intended to last for multiple years.

Dr. Tracy Hayden emphasizes that working with a licensed audiologist provides a higher standard of care and long term protection. An audiology clinic fitting includes diagnostic testing to rule out medical causes of hearing loss, prescription accurate programming based on the individual hearing profile, real ear verification to ensure speech clarity, and safe output levels that protect hearing. Ongoing care and adjustments are also essential as hearing needs change over time.

The bottom line is that while OTC and TV advertised hearing aids may appear convenient, they carry significant risks including auditory deprivation, unsafe sound levels, missed medical conditions, and a short usable lifespan. Professional care from an audiologist leads to safer hearing aids, clearer speech understanding, and healthier hearing over the long term.

Big Sky Audiology Clinic provides comprehensive hearing tests, personalized hearing aid solutions, and ongoing care from an experienced audiologist. The clinic is committed to helping individuals protect their hearing and make informed decisions about their hearing health.

For more information about [hearing aid devices in Billings](#) or to schedule a hearing test, contact Big Sky Audiology Clinic.

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