

# Review: Earplugs crank down the noise while still letting you hear

October 10 2014, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News

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Awhile back, I reviewed the Bean Quiet Sound Amplifier from Etymotic. The Beans are basically hearing aids that amplify sounds so you can hear better.

The difference with the Beans is that you don't need to consult a doctor.

Etymotic is all about helping people hear better and keep their hearing, so when it offered its Music Pro Earplugs (\$299 at [etymotic.com](http://etymotic.com)), I wanted to try them out.

The Music Pros are the opposite of the Beans. They help your hearing by reducing loud sounds while letting you hear normal volumes.

How does that work? Good question.

The Music Pros look exactly like the Beans. They're self-contained, use tiny hearing-aid batteries and fit inside your ear.

If you fit them correctly, they don't show unless you turn your head. The Music Pros have tiny microphones that listen to what you are hearing and process the sound before it gets to your ears.

Each earpiece runs on a tiny No. 10 battery that will last a few weeks if you turn the earplugs off when not in use.

There is no power switch - you turn the earplugs off by unsnapping the

battery doors and removing the batteries. It's easier than it sounds.

There are two modes, and you change modes with a tiny switch on each earpiece.

In 9dB mode, quiet sounds are amplified by 6dB, while 9dB protection is used when the outside noise gets louder.

In 15dB mode, natural sounds come though at their normal levels, but the Music Pros provide 15dB of protection when noise exceeds safe levels.

The Music Pros come with seven different types of tips to accommodate different ear canal shapes.

I was easily able to find one that worked well (I like the spongy ones), and they're easy to change out.

I didn't see any live music during my testing week, but I did simulate the concert experience with over-the-ear headphones cranked up really loud.

The Music Pros did what they said they'd do - they let me hear sounds at a normal volume and definitely kept really loud sounds from getting to my ears.

They're magical, but for \$299 for the pair, I'd expected them to impress.

I'm not entirely sure what the target market is for these - people who work regularly at concert venues, maybe, or people in construction jobs.

I suppose if you wear earplugs as part of your daily life, you'd want to take a look at these.

PROS: Easy to use, nice choice of ear tips, good hearing protection

CONS: Expensive

BOTTOM LINE: If I had a job in which my hearing were stressed regularly, I'd probably invest in these.

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## ETYMOTIC MC3 HEADSET + EARPHONES

I've been listening to Etymotic earphones for at least a decade. Its MC3 headset + earphones is a worthy member of a great line of audio products.

The MC3 (\$79 at [etymotic.com](http://etymotic.com)) has a lot going for it, but most important it's comfortable and sounds really good.

Etymotic includes four types of tips, so chances are good that you'll find one that fits your ears.

Whenever I get a new pair of earphones to try out, I like to see which tips will fit best without any music playing. I just sit and think about how they feel inside my ears for a few minutes.

The MC3s offer great noise isolation if you get the right fit. And they're not heavy on the bass, which I like.

The three-button remote also worked well with my iPhone, both for clear calls and controlling music playback and volume.

Etymotic has a custom-fit earmold option that lets users get molds made of their ears at an audiologist's for a custom set of earpieces. Prices vary

depending on the audiologist, but Etymotic has a list of audiologists it works with, and according to some online who've reviewed the process, the cost is around \$100, which is a bargain and worth checking out.

Overall I like MC3s. They're inexpensive, have a good sound for my ear, fit comfortably and have a microphone so I can use them with my phone.

**PROS:** Inexpensive, options for a custom fit, nice highs and midtones. Very clear and comfortable.

**CONS:** Not heavy on bass notes.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A solid choice if you're not all about the bass.

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