



Over-the-counter hearing aids could help lower cost, says doctor

By Elissa Salamy

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WASHINGTON (TND) — Millions of Americans will be able to buy hearing aids without a prescription later this fall, under a long-awaited rule finalized [earlier this week](#).

Five years ago, Congress passed the Over-The-Counter Hearing Aid Act, directing the [Food and Drug Administration](#) to authorize the sale of hearing aids over the counter. Now, adults with mild to moderate hearing problems can finally purchase hearing aids without a prescription as early as mid-October. The devices will be sold online or over-the-counter at pharmacies and other retail stores.

This is a big deal because it's estimated that about 30 million Americans have mild to moderate hearing loss, yet only about one in five of them ever get themselves hearing aids," said Dr. Jeffrey Singer from the CATO Institute. "That's because you need a prescription, so they have to go to either any audio specialist or an audiologist, which is an expense and an inconvenience in itself."

Singer says the new regulation will also lower the cost of hearing aids, which, according to Singer, can range anywhere from \$2,000 to \$7,000 in price.

"Prescription hearing aids are [very expensive](#). So now, these people can go get them on the market over the counter, where there's going to be much more competition and choice, and prices should come down," said Singer.

But the new regulation limits over-the-counter sales to those over 18 years old with mild to moderate hearing loss.

"Children still have to get a prescription and people with moderate to severe hearing loss have to get a prescription. So I would argue that it should be available over the counter for everyone," said Singer. "That's not to say that it's not necessarily a good idea to go see an audiologist or an ENT specialist if you have a hearing problem, and there's nothing that prevents you from doing so. But there are an awful lot of people out there who know what their situation is."