

## This is the most comprehensive list of all the different types of headphones

If you're having a problem deciding what type is the best for you, we have you covered.

Let's dig in:

**Over-ear** (also known as circumaural, or over-the-ear) headphones are the most common type of headphones with earpads big enough to fit around your entire ear. They're the biggest in size and have a headband that connects two earcups.

### What are over-ear headphones good and bad at?

- **Comfort:** Big over-ear earpads are comfortable and usually well-padded. High-quality headphones with premium materials feel particularly luxurious.
- **Passive isolation:** Since your ears are fully enclosed, little ambient sound passes through. Leather earpads ensure the best isolation. Better passive isolation means less interference from the outside world. That ensures you hear more details without cranking up the volume.
- **Sound Quality:** Over-ear headphones produce sound that feels bigger and more realistic than smaller alternatives (earbuds).
- **Soundstage:** Since drivers are further away from your ears, over-ears create a wider soundstage.
- **Comfort** (with cheap headphones): Sometimes cheaper over-ear headphones come with thin earpads. As a result, your ears touch the hard plastic inside earcups, which eventually causes aching. Also, some can be pretty heavy or have strong clamping force to hold them in place.
- **Stability:** Big and heavy headphones can't withstand rigorous movements, and they fly right off your head.
- **Price:** High-end over-ear headphones can be expensive, priced over \$300 or even \$1000.
- **Portability:** Due to their size, they take up a lot of space. To tackle this problem, some of them are foldable and come with a carrying case.
  - **What are over-ear headphones best for?**
  - They're an excellent choice for traveling and commuting since they offer good isolation and are, in general, very comfortable.
  - If tuned correctly, they're a go-to for studio workers in music production who want their mixes to have natural, accurate sound.

### On-Ear Headphones:

#### What are on-ear headphones good and bad at?

- **Stability:** On-ear fit and the overall lighter construction give better stability during physical activities compared to over-ear headphones.
- **Portability:** Due to their smaller size, they're slightly easier to carry around.
- **Comfort:** If earpads aren't well-padded, the pressure against your earlobes can be irritating. After a while, it becomes painful, which will force you to take a break.
- **Sweating:** Much like over-ears, earpads press against your skin, preventing the air from circulating. Eventually, your skin becomes hot and starts sweating.
- **Passive isolation:** Our earlobes aren't flat, which is why on-ear earpads don't create a perfect seal. Apart from worse noise isolation, sound leakage can be a problem, too.

### **What are on-ear headphones best for?**

If you don't like in-ear fit but want headphones for working out, on-ears are a good alternative.

They're more stable and lighter than over-ears, so they don't feel as obvious on your head during exercise.

### **Earbuds: All The Different Types of Earbuds**

Earbuds are (also known as earphones, in-ear headphones, in-ear monitors, or just buds)

They are the most portable type of headphones. They're the smallest of the bunch and come in various shapes and sizes.

Technically, there are different types of earbuds. More on that below.

Their general advantages are:

- Portability
- Lower price (usually)
- Effective noise isolation
- Stability during activity

### **True Wireless Earbuds:**

True wireless earbuds (TWS, or true wireless headphones) are popular due to their complete lack of wires. They come in a charging case, which is easily portable and helps extend their battery life

All the necessary components are built into the housing:

- DAC (digital-to-analog converter)
- And DSP (digital signal processing)  
Thus wireless earbuds sound the same regardless of the source (signal processing by Bluetooth codecs is far more important).

### **What are true wireless earbuds good and bad at?**

- **Passive isolation:** They seal ears completely and provide great noise isolation. Isolation changes with ear tips. Silicone tips are the most durable, but foam ones isolate the best.
- **Sound quality:** Since earbuds sit inside the ear canal, there's very little resonance. As a result, the sound coming from earbuds can be very clean and detailed.
- **Comfort:** Most true wireless earbuds have an ergonomic design, which ensures both comfort and stability.

- **Stability:** Due to deeper fit, they latch to ears firmly, especially with ear ear hooks and wings. They're by far the best option for sports.
- **Portability:** True wireless earbuds are small in size and can fit in any pocket.
- **Durability:** The lack of cables means fewer potential weak point. Many true wireless earbuds have some water protection.
- **Hygiene:** Your ears are cleaning themselves naturally. However, when you plug earbuds into your ear canal, you push the earwax back inside. Some of the wax ends up on your earbuds, which attracts dirt and, if you don't clean them regularly, can result in an ear infection.
- **Narrow soundstage:** Earbuds don't interact with your pinna, which is essential for wide soundstage perception. While the results can still be decent, the wideness is nowhere near what bigger headphones can achieve.
- **Battery longevity:** True wireless earbuds work on batteries. Thankfully, the battery duration is getting longer (an average of 7 hours per charge). Though, due to battery deterioration you can expect a noticeable drop in battery life after 2 years.
- **Audio Lag:** Bluetooth codecs have to pack the audio signal on one side and unpack it on the other. That takes time, which is why you can experience a visible audio delay when watching videos and playing games.

#### **What are true wireless earbuds best for?**

They're great for frequent commuters and travelers who want something portable to fit in a pocket.

TWS earbuds are also a favorite among active users love to work out. The convenient true wireless design is a great alternative for those who are still rocking wired earbuds (check best workout earbuds).

#### **Wired Earbuds:**

##### **What are wired earbuds good and bad at?**

- **Sound Quality:** Wired solutions are still a better-sounding option. They don't rely on DSP on tuning, making their sound performance more scalable (better amps and cables result in tighter, more detailed sound).
- **Noise isolation:** In-ear fit offers the best isolation from the outside world. If you pick foam tips or multi-flanged silicone ones, the passive isolation gets even better.
- **Stability:** Earbuds with wires that go over the ear offer superb stability.
- **Cost:** The cheapest earbuds are wired.
- **Zero audio latency:** Wires are the most reliable way for audio transmission with zero audio delay when watching videos or playing games.
- **Lack of compatible devices:** Modern phones ditched the headphone jack. You need a USB dongle or a separate MP3 player.
- **Cable noise:** When wires rub against your clothes, they vibrate, and produce cable noise. Cable coating changes its intensity. Fabric or cheap plastic cables vibrate the most.
- **Cables:** While reliable, they are very annoying. Cables get stuck on a doorknob or an armrest, violently unplugging your earbuds.
- **Durability:** Cables are a weak point that can make your earbuds useless if damaged. Also, wired earbuds can't handle water (except swimming earbuds with special protection).

## **Classic Earbuds (that don't go in ear):**

Classic earbuds (or earphones) sit in front of the ear canal and rest on your earlobes.

And apart from the very successful Apple AirPods 2, AirPods 3 (see AirPods facts), classic earphones aren't that popular. It's hard to find new models from other brands.

### **What are classic earphones (that don't go in ear) good and bad at?**

- **Better Awareness:** Earphones don't block your ears, they let in more ambient noise. This is great if you want better awareness.
- **Comfort:** No in-ear pressure means better overall comfort. Many earphones are super lightweight, so you barely feel them.
- **Soundstage:** They sit further away from your eardrums, which is why they're able to create a slightly wider soundstage than in-ears.
- **Sound Quality:** While many sound good, they can't reach the same level of quality as in-ear headphones. The lack of isolation significantly reduces their bass performance.
- **Stability:** Earphones don't grab your ears, which makes them susceptible to fall out during movement. They aren't suitable for sports activities.

### **What are classic earphones (that don't go in ear) best for?**

They're more comfortable because they don't intrude your ear canal. If in-ear headphones irritate your ears but you still want earbuds, check the best earbuds that don't go in ears.