Earplug Options for Guitarists

Musician hearing protection you will actually wear. No brands recommended. Ringing or muffled hearing? See an audiologist or your GP.

How long until a full day's limit? (85 dB over 8 hours, 3 dB exchange rate)

Level	85 dB	88 dB	91 dB	94 dB	97 dB	100 dB
Time to 100% dose	8 hours	4 hours	2 hours	1 hour	30 minutes	15 minutes

Sources: Safe Work Australia (85 decibels averaged over eight hours; 140 decibel peak) and NIOSH (85 dB(A), 3 dB exchange rate). NIOSH measured school band rehearsals at 91 to 97 dB(A), sometimes above 100.

The main types

Type	What it is	Good for	Watch out for
Foam	Soft plugs you roll thin and let expand in the ear canal.	Cheap backup in every gig bag; loud stages.	Must be rolled and inserted deeply; many players find the band sounds muffled.
Pre formed	Reusable plugs already shaped to fit most ears, often with flanges.	Rehearsals; easy to put in and take out.	Size matters; a loose plug gives little protection.
Musicians' (flat attenuation)	Designed to reduce all frequencies evenly so music stays clear.	Players who need to hear tone and the singer.	Still needs a good seal; check the real reduction.
Custom moulded	Made from an impression of your ears by an audiologist, often with swappable filters.	Regular gigging and teaching in loud rooms.	Costs more up front; needs an appointment.
Earmuffs	Cups over the whole ear.	Drummers at home, loud practice, people near the kit.	Hot and bulky on stage.

How much reduction do you need?

NIOSH says most workers need **10 dB or less** of reduction, and almost any protector fitted correctly can give that. Aim to bring your level down to about **75 to 85 dB**. Too much reduction makes people pull their plugs out. NIOSH also says most workers get **less than half** of the reduction printed on the packet, so halve the label if unsure.

Fitting checklist

Check	Tick
Clean, dry hands, and follow the fitting instructions on the packet.	[ ]
Foam: roll it thin and let it expand fully inside the ear canal before you judge the fit.	[ ]
Seal check: with plugs in, the room should sound clearly quieter, not just slightly duller.	[ ]
Plugs in before soundcheck, out only in a quiet room.	[ ]
Spare pair in the gig bag and in the guitar case.	[ ]
Reusable plugs: clean and store them as the packet says, and replace worn ones.	[ ]

My plugs

Plug	Label rating	Real reduction I assume	Where I keep them

When to see an audiologist or your GP

Ringing (tinnitus), buzzing or muffled hearing after playing, ear pain, sounds seeming distorted or the same note sounding at different pitches, or everyday sounds becoming painfully loud. NIOSH also suggests musicians have a hearing test every year, even without symptoms.

Rehearsal Room Volume Plan

Agree it as a band, pin it on the wall, and measure once a month.

Step	What we do	Agreed
1. Vocal first	Set the vocal at a comfortable level, then bring everyone else up to it.	[ ]
2. Amps at ears	Tilt or raise amps so players hear them at a lower volume.	[ ]
3. Quiet tools	Hot rods or brushes on new songs; lower amp settings while working out parts; full volume run near the end only.	[ ]
4. Quiet breaks	A break outside the room at least once an hour.	[ ]
5. Plugs in	Plugs in before the first song and for soundcheck.	[ ]
6. Our limit	Room level we agree to stay under: _____ dB (measured where the guitarist stands).	[ ]
7. Check in	Anyone with ringing or muffled hearing tells the band; we turn down next time.	[ ]

Sound reading log

Take a reading from where you stand during a full song. Phone apps are rough, so use the same phone and spot each time.

Date	Room or venue	Song or part	Reading (dB)	Hours	Plugs used	Notes

Ringing, muffled hearing or ear pain after playing? See an audiologist or your GP. NIOSH suggests musicians have a hearing test every year. Work out your weekly dose with the free calculator at maximsguitarworkshop.com/musician_hearing_protection.