Hearing protection 101

Hearing protection should be part of every shooting day. Whether you shoot clays, game or targets, choosing suitable protection and wearing it correctly helps safeguard your hearing.

Why hearing protection matters

Gunfire can cause permanent hearing damage after a single unprotected shot. Repeated exposure can also lead to hearing loss and tinnitus, the ringing or buzzing that can persist after the noise has stopped. Protect your ears whenever shooting is taking place, including when you are watching or waiting your turn.

Noise-related hearing loss can develop gradually, making the early signs easy to miss. Consistent protection matters even when your hearing seems normal.

Choosing suitable protection

Start with the protection you need for your shooting environment, then check fit and comfort.

- **Understand the rating.** SNR (Single Number Rating) is a laboratory measure used to compare hearing protectors. A higher figure generally indicates greater noise reduction in those tests, but it does not tell you exactly how much every gunshot will be reduced.
- **Check the fit.** Ear cushions should seal fully around each ear. Try your ear defenders with your usual shooting glasses and headwear, keep hair clear of the seals, and make sure mounting your gun does not dislodge the cups.
- **Consider where you shoot.** Indoor and covered ranges can require additional protection, such as earplugs beneath ear defenders. When using both, their SNR ratings cannot simply be added together. Follow range guidance and the manufacturer's instructions when choosing and using your protection.
- **Prioritise comfort.** Choose a secure fit you can wear for the whole session. Weight, headband pressure and the feel of the cushions can all influence comfort.

Passive and electronic ear defenders

Passive ear defenders reduce sound through their cups and seals, without batteries. Electronic models add microphones and speakers that reproduce quieter sounds, such as conversation and range commands, at a controlled level. The cups and seals still provide passive protection against loud noise.

Electronic hear-through can make it easier to follow instructions without lifting an ear cup. This is useful when receiving coaching or listening for range commands between shots.

Set up the controls before shooting starts and choose a hear-through level that lets you follow instructions comfortably. Turning up the hear-through volume does not increase the headset's passive noise reduction.

Two options from SWATCOM

BASC partner SWATCOM offers both electronic and passive ear defenders for shooting.

SWATCOM Active360 electronic ear defenders

The Active360 combines 28 dB SNR of protection with adjustable hear-through audio, helping you hear conversation and sounds around you between shots. A voice-prompted menu makes it straightforward to adjust the volume and sound settings.

Settings include speaker balance, an equaliser and hear-through response time, allowing you to tailor the audio to your preferences. The headset weighs approximately 320 g without batteries.

The slim headset runs for up to 250 hours on two AAA batteries, with a low-battery warning and automatic shut-down. It has also been tested for wet conditions, dust and temperature extremes.

Find out more about the SWATCOM Active360.

SWATCOM SC12 passive ear defenders

The SC12 is a straightforward passive option with a 29 dB SNR. It weighs approximately 220 g and has a folding headband for easy storage. With no batteries or electronic controls to manage, it suits shooters who prefer a simple design, or want a spare pair in their kit.

As a passive model, it reduces surrounding sound without electronically reproducing quieter voices. Consider how easily you can follow instructions while keeping it correctly fitted.

Find out more about the SWATCOM SC12.

Looking after your hearing protection

Inspect the cushions and headband regularly, and replace worn or damaged parts as the manufacturer recommends. Check for split or hardened cushions and a loose headband, as these can affect the seal around your ears.

Keep your ear defenders clean, follow the care instructions and carry spare batteries for electronic models. Check that the hear-through function works before heading out. If you lend someone a spare pair, clean it between users and help them check the fit.

Use a range bag to keep your hearing protection and other shooting essentials organised between outings. Wear protection throughout any period when shots may be fired.

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