

Enjoy a Concert Safely When You Have Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

I rarely go to concerts; I am afraid to damage my hearing any more than it already is. But when my sister invited me and my daughter to the Adele concert in Madison Square Garden, the look on my daughter's face said it all. We had to go. And it was my job to make sure we enjoy the concert safely.

I started doing my research so I could bring ear protection for everyone—my sister, niece, daughter, and of course, myself.

I was probably the easiest one to protect. I already have hearing aids that can be shut off, custom fit earplugs that I use for snorkeling, and ear muffs with a noise canceling feature. Some subset or all of the above would keep my ears safe under almost all conditions. For the kids, I brought child-sized earmuffs and for my sister, high fidelity earplugs that were recommended online.

But would they wear them? My daughter was the easiest to convince. In fact, she really had no option: No earmuffs, no concert. Still, I was very proud of her attitude about wearing them (no arguments) and that she acted as a positive role model for her younger cousin. My sister, of course, wore hers with no complaint. She attends a lot of concerts and, given my hearing loss, understands the importance of hearing protection.

The concert itself was wonderful—Adele was in full voice and as concerts go, it was fairly tame. However, it was still very loud—100 decibels at times. Our respective ear protections (rated at 20-30 decibels) kept our ears safe.

Surprisingly, Adele discussed hearing protection at the concert. During the show, she often interacted with the audience and, at one point, spoke with a 5-year-old boy and his parents. She complimented the boy for wearing earmuffs to protect his ears and told the audience how important it is to protect their hearing.

I was thrilled that Adele chose to reinforce this important message for the audience. I wish more recording artists would do the same.



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After the concert, no one in our group complained of ringing ears or other hearing issues. All around, a great success!

How can you stay safe at a concert? Follow these simple steps.

1. Know the facts. Research shows that wearing earplugs at concerts can help protect your hearing. A recent study of concertgoers showed that those who wore earplugs had significantly lower incidences of temporary hearing loss and tinnitus after the concert (*JAMA Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg.* 2016;142[6]:551).

2. Ask your audiologist. They may have recommendations that are specific to your type of hearing aids or hearing loss. If you attend concerts frequently, consider investing in a custom fit option.

3. Experiment before you go. Before attending any event, try out different types of hearing protection to see which feels more comfortable to wear, both with and without your hearing aids. This saves you time and effort from experimenting at the event itself, and assures satisfactory hearing protection during the entire concert.

4. Learn to use them properly. Explore online guides such as *It's A Noisy Planet*, a campaign sponsored by the National Institutes for Health (NIH), for proper instructions on using standard foam earplugs.

5. Bring extras. Offer earplugs to family, friends, and those seated near you. Unfortunately, earplugs are not often sold at concerts, so the people around you might be very grateful for the protection. Plus, it is a wonderful way to promote awareness of hearing preservation. 