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# A Neurodivergent Audio Engineer's Guide to the Best Headphones for Autistic Adults (based on a Unique Survey of 31 Responses)

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As a neurodivergent audio engineer, I understand the struggles of finding good headphones and earbuds that best fit our personal needs. For me, I struggle a lot with sensory sensitivity – mainly little things, like repeated noises (a clock ticking), mumbling outside my apartment, the fan of my computer running too long, the fridge, etc.

For a long time, especially before I got diagnosed, I just dealt with it, not fully understanding why I struggled and “freaked out” over such little things. Now, after studying audio, working in the field, and finally learning and understanding my own brain a bit better, I have found ways to cope to where I no longer have as many “freak outs” like I used to.

One of these ways is by listening to music when I am not working and being able to drown out the outside world when I am working, as I usually have to focus on the audio that I am editing (podcasting is fun when you can focus 😊).

Through a bunch of trial and error, I have been able to discover what works best for me. For work, I like good wired headphones with good sound quality and good noise cancellation. When I am at home, I tend to care more about the price and comfort than a professional sound quality or noise cancellation as not being able to fully hear the outside world can be dangerous (I just don't want to hear the fridge okay?!).

Spectroomz conducted a survey asking autistic and other neurodivergent folks about their headphone preferences. 31 responses were recorded. While most people preferred wireless headphones, some did prefer wired headphones or earbuds. When looking for a new pair of

headphones or earbuds, the responses could be summarized into three main categories of importance: noise cancellation, sound quality, and comfort/appearance.

Taking these preferences into account, I wanted to help you discover what works best for you along with providing some science behind why they sound and feel the way they do! The headphones listed below I own, have tried, or were recommended to me by trusted friends.

**Disclosure:** Some links in this article are affiliate links. We may earn a small commission if you make a purchase — at no extra cost to you. Our recommendations are based solely on survey results and expert opinion, not commissions.

## Wired Headphones

Wired headphones are considered the “norm” in the professional studio world and are what I have mainly used as an audio engineer. When working on a song or podcast, it is super important to have a wired connection as sometimes issues arise with bluetooth. The last thing you want is for the audio to not be mixed properly because your headphones malfunctioned.

My go-to cheap pair of headphones are the [Sony MDR 7506](#). You can find these in just about every single music studio (because they are relatively cheap and easy to replace), and some of your favorite songs were probably recorded and mixed using these. For me, I used these mainly

for my undergrad and first year of grad school. I always find myself coming back to these in a pinch. The build quality for only \$98 is amazing, and they surprisingly block out most sounds when using them. The sound quality is great – they are fairly well-balanced across all frequencies. The only downside is that the ear cups are not super comfortable, but the headband is adjustable, and over time you get used to the feeling of them.

Another pair of cheap headphones that I would recommend are the [Shure SRH440](#). I used these when I was interning at a podcast studio in Nashville and absolutely fell in love with them. Priced at \$99, they are super comfortable with an adjustable headband, are lightweight, and also look very sleek. With a great sound quality (the frequency response is fairly flat with a slight boost in the higher frequencies) and really good noise-canceling (I couldn't hear people talking to me when wearing them), they are a great option. Unfortunately though, they are not the best when it comes to high-intensity activities like working out as they will most likely slide off. Additionally, sometimes the bass will sound inconsistent between different audio or music tracks, so keep that in mind when purchasing. Otherwise, they are one of my faves.

My current set of headphones are the [Sennheiser DT 770 PRO](#). I bought these as an upgrade from my 7506s. Much like the MDR 7506, these are also extremely common in recording (even Taylor Swift has used these!), but are priced a bit higher at \$169.

If you like a little bit of sound from the outside world, these are great as they dampen the sound but don't fully block out outside noise. You will

still be able to pay attention to what is going on around you, which is a huge reason why I chose these for myself. With an adjustable headband and large ear cups, these are also much more comfortable on the ears and will allow you to listen to whatever you want for much longer. Additionally, these headphones are built with higher quality materials, so they feel sturdier without weighing too much. The 770s are well-balanced and accurate in the bass and mid range frequencies, but become a bit inconsistent with the treble frequencies, though still sound great. The biggest flaw with these is that sound is well known to leak a bit if your volume is too high, so keep that in mind when purchasing.

A similar pair of headphones to the 770s is the [Audio-Technica ATH-M50x](#), priced at \$149. While studying in grad school, a few of my classmates used these and let me try them out in class. These are super comfortable with large ear cups to avoid pinching and an adjustable headband. These are fairly balanced across frequency ranges, but have a bit better treble response than the 770s. Because of the closed-back design, these have passive noise-canceling abilities. While a lot of outside sound will be dulled (especially higher frequencies), some noise will still be heard.

For more expensive options, I would recommend the [Steven Slate Audio VSX Modeling Headphones - Essentials Edition](#) (priced at \$299) or the [Sennheiser HD 650 Open-Back AudioPhile and Reference Headphones](#) (normally priced at \$499.95 but currently on sale for \$399.95). The VSXs are lightweight, have comfortable ear cups, an adjustable headband, and a fairly even frequency response across all ranges, though the treble frequencies are a bit unstable. These headphones also have a detachable and a no-tangle cable, so it's easy to move around with

them! The biggest downside to these in my opinion is that there is software that comes with them for mixing in different spaces, though I do not believe this software is necessary for just plain listening. The Sennheisers have an above average consistency across frequency ranges, especially in the bass due to the open-back design. They also are extremely comfortable with oval ear cups and an adjustable headband. The biggest downside to these is there is very little noise-canceling with only a tiny bit of the higher frequencies getting dulled. Due to this, I would not recommend them for working in loud areas.

## **Bluetooth Headphones**

Bluetooth headphones have recently become very popular in modern day culture. Considering how they are easier to travel with and don't have an annoying cable flopping around, I can understand the hype.

For under \$100, I would recommend the [Skullcandy Hesh 2 Over-Ear Wireless Headphones](#) (\$57) or the [Soundcore by Anker Life Q30 Hybrid](#) (\$79.99). While the bass and mid frequencies are slightly boosted and the higher frequencies are decreased for the Hesh 2, these headphones are still relatively consistent throughout the entire frequency range when listening to various forms of audio. Unfortunately these headphones do not have any active noise cancellation, but they are able to dull sounds within the mid and treble ranges. There is also some leakage with these headphones, so it is good to keep that in mind when in public.

Additionally, these are not the most comfortable headphones due to the odd shape of the ear cups and the lack of cushion on the headband. The Soundcore Q30, on the other hand, has great noise-cancellation as they

have an active noise feature within the “Transport” mode setting as well as a few other mode settings to fit your listening environment. While these headphones may be a bit bass-heavy right out of the box, there is an app that allows you to adjust the balance of frequencies so that the sound is personalized to your listening needs. They’re also very comfortable, with padded oval ear cups, an adjustable headband, and weigh fairly light.

For a medium-priced pair, I would recommend the [Sennheiser Consumer Audio ACCENTUM](#) (regularly \$149.95 but on sale for \$129.95). The noise cancellation is pretty good, though it does struggle with blocking out low bass noises such as plane engines. These headphones also have a great frequency response across most frequencies, although there is a boost in the bass and a slight dip in the higher treble frequencies. Even so, I would still consider these headphones to have a great sound quality and easy physical controls to use for the different listening modes it offers as well as for volume. They are also fairly comfortable and lightweight with adjustable padded ear cups and an adjustable and padded headband. The biggest flaws in my opinion would be that the ear cups are not very large, so those with big ears may feel a bit more uncomfortable than someone with smaller ears as well as the lack of travel portability, though they are still good for daily commutes.

Another similar pair that I would recommend is the [Audio-Technica ATH-M50xBT2](#), priced at \$199. These have a battery life of over 60 hours, so they are great for those who forget to charge devices regularly (like myself). The sound is also great with a very good balance and consistency over all frequencies. These are also super comfortable with

thick padding on the adjustable headband and on the ear cups. These headphones can also collapse, which make it easy to store or pack up when traveling. For normal commutes as well as for fitness, these are fairly decent with easy-to-use controls , but they may slip off a bit due to their instability. Their noise cancellation is lacking with only being able to block out higher-pitched frequency noises and reducing mid-range frequency noises.

For a more expensive option, the [Sony WH-1000XM4](#) is great, normally priced at \$252.99 (currently on sale for \$238). These headphones have a battery life of around 37 hours and are fairly comfortable to wear for commuting, working out, and being in the office. They have easy controls, lightweight earpads on the cups, an adjustable and padded headband, and the cups are oval-shaped to better fit the listener's ears. While the bass is a bit boosted out-of-the-box, there is a companion app that allows you to adjust using a graphic EQ. These headphones have fantastic noise-cancellation and also have a function where you can switch between active noise cancellation or just noise isolation.

The most expensive option for bluetooth headphones costing between \$281.23-\$399 (depending on color) would be the [Bowers & Wilkins Px7 S2e](#). These headphones have a battery life of about 30 hours and have fairly easy controls for volume, pausing, and phone calls. While these also have a bit of a boosted bass and a reduced mid-range, these work great for listeners who enjoy darker-sounding or heavy-bass music or audio. With that in mind, there is also an app that comes with these headphones that allows you to adjust the frequency balance using an EQ. These headphones also have great noise cancellation and also allows for switching between active noise cancellation and what they

call “transparency mode,” where outside noise is reduced but still heard. The comfort level of these headphones is also fairly high, with oval and cushioned ear cups that can be adjusted as well as an adjustable and cushioned headband. Additionally, these come in a range of colors that vary the price. Currently, at the time of writing this, the cheapest pair is the “Forest Green” color on Amazon. Furthermore, when used, they do not feel like your head is being squeezed off, as some headphones tend to feel like. Despite the fairly short battery life, I do genuinely believe these are worth the price.

## **Earbuds and In-Ears**

While not everyone likes earbuds or in-ear earbuds, these are usually the cheapest option when looking for audio listening devices. These usually range in price between \$5 to \$500 (though some do cost higher) with the cheaper options usually being uncomfortable, having bad sound quality, and disappointing noise cancellation.

Thankfully, a cheaper set that does not fit this category would be the [Apple Earpods](#), priced at a whopping \$18.47. These wired earbuds used to be standard when purchasing an Apple product, though now they are sold separately. These have been my go-to earbuds for when I am casually listening to music at home and not working due to their price, sound quality, and portability. These earbuds are fairly consistent in the mid range frequencies, though may have some issues with both the lower and higher frequencies. Additionally, the fit can be uncomfortable for some since it has a “one size fits all” design, especially if you have smaller ears compared to others. These do not have any noise-canceling abilities, though from personal experience, these can definitely muddle and dull outside sounds enough to focus on whatever tasks are at hand. Personally, these flaws are not that big of a deal for me, which is

why I prefer them for casual listening.

For just under \$100 and with a bit better quality, I recommend the [JBL Tune Buds True Wireless Earbuds](#) (\$99.95 but currently on sale for \$49.95!). These wireless in-ear earbuds are extremely portable, have amazing battery life, and are very comfortable to wear. The noise-cancellation function, while not the best, can and will block out a bunch of background noise (like the fridge!). You can also set them into Ambient mode so that you can better hear your surroundings when needed. These also have an amazing sound quality, as most frequencies are well-balanced and consistent, though the treble can be slightly varied by a couple of decibels.

For those who want a more expensive pair of earbuds, I would recommend the [Shure Aonic 215 Gen 2 True Wireless Earphones](#), currently priced at \$229. These have a sound isolation function where up to 37 dB of noise is blocked without adjusting, which is available within the app that comes with it. The app that comes with these earbuds also allows you to equalize your sound, meaning you are able to adjust how much bass or treble you want for your listening pleasure. Besides the charging case, they also come with different sizes of foam or Soft Flex ear tips for the listener's comfort and are sweat proof - perfect for working out at the gym. The only con about these is that the battery life is not the best, with only 8 hours available per charge, though the charging case provides an additional 3 charges.

## Summary

While all these headphones and earbuds are great options and my personal recommendations, there are thousands of other products not mentioned under \$500 that could work for your needs as well. I hope this helps narrow down some options while you are searching for your next best pair of headphones that matches your preferences!

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