

Hearing Aids, Cochlear Implants, and Cell Phones

Can I use a cell phone if I have hearing aids or a cochlear implant?

If you have hearing aids (HAs) or a cochlear implant (CI), it is important to find a cell phone that works for you. One feature to find out if you have in your HAs or CI is a telecoil. **A telecoil, also known as a t-coil, will pick up the dedicated electromagnetic signal from a phone to help the user hear speech clearly.** Rules adopted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) require cell phone makers and service providers to make phones work better for people using HAs or a CI.

These rules require the following:

- less static
- less interference
- better telecoil connections
- wireless devices that support real-time text

How do I find out if a cell phone will work for me?

Look at the label. There are a few places to look for the label to find out if a cell phone is compatible with your personal amplification.

- in the cell phone user manual
- on a card next to the phone on display at the cell phone store
- on the cell phone package
- online if you know the exact make and model of the phone

If you already have HAs or a CI, the manufacturer of your system may have a list of compatible cell phones. You can always check with your audiologist on what cell phones will work with your hearing devices. If you cannot find the label in any of these places, the phone may not be compatible.

Check the microphone (M) rating. A higher M number means that the phone will sound louder. The M rating is on a scale of 1 to 4. Cell phones that work well with HAs or CIs will have a rating of M3 or M4.

Check the telecoil (T) rating. A higher T rating indicates a stronger telecoil connection, which can result in a clearer call. The T rating is on a scale of 1 to 4. If you have a HA or CI with a telecoil, look for a phone that has a rating of T3 or T4.

What other cell phone features should I consider?

Check out the free features and options that make your cell phone easier to use. You can find most of these in your phone's settings. The features listed below are often found on most smartphones but may need to be "enabled" in the phone settings before use. Look for access to these features before purchasing your cellular phone:

- Adjustable levels. The ability to adjust ringer volume and ring tones.
- Alerts. Vibrating or flashing screen alerts for incoming calls or messages.
- Bluetooth. Some personal amplification will connect directly to the smartphone or cell phone via Bluetooth. Test out the Bluetooth connection before purchasing your phone.
- Display and keypad lighting control. This is important because the lighting is a source of noise for telecoil users.
- Speakerphone. Using a speakerphone may reduce interference by putting distance between the phone and the hearing aid.
- Video calling capability.
- Teletypewriter (TTY). Make sure the phone has "TTY mode" or "TTY option" in its menu system. Look for the TTY symbol on the phone's package or user manual.
- Real-time text (RTT). A feature available on most smartphones that allows individuals to hold a conversation via text instantaneously. RTT lets the person receiving the message read the text as it is being typed.

Which accessories and attachments make cell phone connections better?

Some add-on devices can provide hands-free phone use, which is important while driving. Many states



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now require cell phone users to use such “hands-free” devices while driving. You can use a Bluetooth connection to your car’s stereo or the speakerphone option on your phone.

Several manufacturers have developed accessories to use with your HAs and CI. Accessory options include neck loops, small remote microphones, and ear hooks. These accessories can be connected wireless via Bluetooth or plug into the cell phone to make it easier to hear and “hands free”.

Lastly, some cell phones can stream phone calls and music directly to some HAs and CIs using Bluetooth, thus eliminating the need for additional accessories. Check with your audiologist to see if your hearing devices require an additional accessory or if there are direct streaming capabilities.

Additional tips to keep in mind before buying a new cell phone:

Try the device in the store before you buy it. Shop at stores where the staff are willing and able to answer your questions. Try different phones before you buy one. Try them at home and at work. Some wireless carriers will allow you to trade up to a new phone after a trial period. It is important to try the phone and find out how it works for your specific needs.

Notes:

For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit www.asha.org/aud/pei/.

Know the cancellation policy. Most wireless carriers will allow you to return a product—within a specified time period—if the cell phone doesn’t work well for you. Ask about policies on cancellation and early termination fees.

Where can I get further information? The AccessWireless.Org website provides information about hearing aid accessibility and cell phone compatibility as well as frequently asked questions and brochures. Compatibility information is typically provided by the hearing device manufacturer and can be found on the manufacturer’s website.

Lastly, consulting with an audiologist for assistance is a great way to find out what devices may work for you and your individual hearing needs. [Find a certified audiologist on ASHA ProFind online directory.](#)

Your audiologist knows your hearing aids well and may give you additional helpful tips. Be sure to ask the audiologist any questions that you have.

Content contributed by ASHA member Tina Childress, AuD, CCC-A.

For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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