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AUDIOLOGY

Information Series

Hearing Aids and Cell Phones: What You Should Know Before You Buy

What do the new Federal Communications Commission rules require?

If you have hearing aids or a cochlear implant, it will now be easier for you to find a cell phone that will work for you. New rules adopted by the Federal Communications Commission require cell phone makers and service providers to make phones work better for people using hearing aids and cochlear implants. These rules require the following:

- Less static
- Less interference
- Better telecoil connections

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

Look at the label. To find out if a cell phone is hearing aid compatible (HAC), look for the label in one of these places:

- On a card next to the phone on display at the cell phone store
- On the cell phone package
- In the cell phone user manual

If you cannot find the label in any of these places, the phone is not HAC.

Rate your phone. Cell phones that work well with hearing aids will have a microphone (M) rating of M3 or M4. This means the cell phone will work with the hearing aid in the microphone position. A higher M number means the phone will sound clearer.

If you have a hearing aid or cochlear implant with a telecoil, look for a phone that has a telecoil (T) rating of T3 or T4. A higher T rating will make your conversations clearer.

Rate your hearing aid. Hearing aid makers will use a similar rating system to let you know how well their hearing aids work in the microphone or the telecoil mode. Hearing aids using the microphone mode will be rated from M1 to M4. A higher rating means you will hear less

noise and have a better connection. The rating for the telecoil will be from T1 to T4. A higher rating means you will be able to hear better in the telecoil mode.

Add up the M or T ratings for the cell phone and the hearing aid.

- Combined rating of 6: Considered “best” or “excellent.” This rating would provide highly usable, excellent performance.
- Combined rating of 5: Considered “normal.” Acceptable for normal, regular phone use.
- Combined rating of 4: Considered “usable.” May allow you to complete a brief call, but this is not an acceptable quality for normal, regular phone use.

Most new hearing aids will have an M2/T2 rating. Ask your audiologist about the rating of your hearing aid. The rating system is not required for cochlear implants.

What other features should I consider?

You may want to look at other features and options that make cell phones usable and convenient. These cell phone features include the following:

- Volume control. Most phones have an adjustable volume control.
- Display and keypad lighting control. This is important because the lighting is a source of noise for telecoil users.
- Vibrating alerts or vibrating accessory
- Flashing screen to alert to a call
- Different ringer volume and tones
- Text messaging services and ease of use on the phone device
- Speakerphone. Using a speakerphone may reduce interference by putting distance between the phone and the hearing aid.
- Teletypewriter (TTY) or other assistive device connections. 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.

- Speech-to-text
- Video streaming

Are there any accessories and attachments that can make cell phone connections better?

Add-on devices may also make cell phone and hearing aid connections better. These devices put distance between the hearing aid and the cell phone. This decreases the interference between the two devices.

Some add-on devices can provide hands-free phone use, which is important while driving. Many states now require cell phone users to use such “hands-free” devices while driving. If you use the microphone mode in your hearing aid, you may be able to use the speakerphone function available on some wireless devices.

Several manufacturers have developed neck loops and ear hooks for hearing aids or cochlear implants that have a telecoil. These neck loops and ear hooks include a microphone and plug into the cell phone to make it easier to hear.

People who use an in-the-ear hearing aid may benefit from an add-on device that has an earbud (like the earbuds used in personal audio devices). The earbud connects to an amplifier and microphone, and attaches to the cell phone. Those who prefer Bluetooth (wireless) mode can use a

device that connects directly to a behind-the-ear hearing aid or use neck loops or ear hooks.

Any last tips for me to know before I purchase new technology?

Try before you buy! Shop at stores where the staff are willing and able to answer your questions. Try different phones before you buy one. Some wireless carriers will allow you to trade up to a new phone after a certain period of time.

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

Shop for plans that fit your communication style. If you like to text message more than talk on the phone, look for a plan that has a lot of text messaging minutes. Otherwise, you may have to pay different fees for text and voice services.

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.

NOTES:



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



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