

OCTOBER 20, 2009
HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION MEETING
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Here is a recap of what was discussed at the last meeting, plus additional information to help you understand the technology better:

HEARING AIDS:

As we all know, hearing aids and cochlear implants are great for one-on-one interactions where there is little background noise. However, many situations (like noisy places, classrooms, group meetings, conference workshops, churches, etc) do not provide this ideal listening environment. So what to do? Fortunately, assistive listening devices (or ALDs) are available to improve the listening environment in these situations so that effective communication can take place. First, before we go into what an ALD is, we do have to stress the importance of using a good telecoil for those who have hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Simply put, a telecoil is a small coil in your hearing aid or cochlear implant that creates an electromagnetic induction, allowing you to use devices like a telephone, cell phone, and an ALD. This can be turned on by a physical switch (“T” setting on your aid) or a program option you have to switch to in your device. Trying to go into specifics about the mechanics of this is not of importance here. Just knowing about this setting is available is important in the following paragraphs to come.

Do I have a telecoil in my hearing aid? If you are not sure if you have one, or if you do in fact know you don’t have a telecoil or sense that you may have a weak telecoil, then see your hearing aid or audiologist about getting a good telecoil put in (if this can be feasible with your device). Not all hearing aid specialists or audiologists tell you about this, and usually is something you discover later by talking with other consumers like at our meetings. In any case, telecoils can be fitted or turned on in the hearing aid or cochlear implant done for free; exceptions may be completely-in-the-canal (CIC) or in-the-canal (IC) hearing aids, as there is usually not enough room. For more information about hearing aids and their features, go to:

Additional information about hearing aids and their features can be accessed by the following:

Consumer Reports Health sites (first link you can access, but the rest of the links you will need to sign up to be a member).

1. Different types of hearing aids; helpful to someone new with what the options are:
<http://www.consumerreports.org/health/healthy-living/home-medical-supplies/hearing/hearing-aids/which-type-is-best-for-you/hearing-aids-which-type.htm>
2. Compares features among 44 brands: <http://www.consumerreports.org/health/healthy-living/home-medical-supplies/hearing/hearing-aids/hearing-aid-features/hearing-aids-features.htm>

3. Lab tests of features ratings: <http://www.consumerreports.org/health/healthy-living/home-medical-supplies/hearing/hearing-aids/lab-tests-of-hearing-aid-features/hearing-aids-hearing-aid-chart.htm>

Consumer Guide to Hearing Aids – Illustrates all the different styles of hearing aids and compares the different models for features. To purchase, go to: http://www.hearingloss.org/learn/hearing_aid_publication.asp

Note: We also have a sample copy for review at the meetings only if you would like to look at this before purchasing.

TELECOILS / ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES:

Back to telecoils. Why are we stressing the importance of this? The advantage of this over just using your default microphone setting on your hearing aid is that you will hear only the person speaking loudly and clearly with little or no background interference, whereas the microphone setting amplifies everything in the room even noise and you won't be able to hear the speaker as well (this is usually frustrating no matter if you sit up close or not). Think about what we use at our meetings (if you turn on your telecoil) with the loop wired around the room and when a speaker talks into the handheld microphone, notice that you don't hear anything but the speaker loudly and clearly and doesn't matter where you sit in the room. Pretty neat, eh? And very important too.

Now that we have covered telecoils, let's move on to what an assistive listening device (ALD) is: An ALD consists of the following four (4) basic components:

- **A microphone** (can be a normal microphone or lapel mic) that takes in the sound from sound source or person speaking and amplifies it. Think of our meetings when we have to speak into the microphone in order for everyone to understand.
- **A transmitter** in the form of any of the following systems:
 - Electromagnetic loop (like the black loop wire looped around the room at our meetings)
 - FM system (a system that has a designated frequency) that you can use this at meetings, classrooms, or conference rooms.
 - Infrared (light) – like what they have at the movies or theatres (you can identify this by the box you wear that has a plastic bubble on it).
- **A receiver** - a box-like device that you wear (for FM or infrared) or your telecoil in your hearing aid or cochlear implant (for loop systems like at our meetings).
- **A coupling device** such as a neckloop, silhouette, ear bud, or a headphone.

For users with a hearing aid or cochlear implant that have a telecoil:

You can use either a neckloop (for all hearing aids) that you wear around your neck, OR as an option for those that wear behind-the-ear hearing aids, you can use a silhouette (looks like a hearing aid, but black and thin that you wear). You can't use an ear bud since you already have a hearing aid in your ear. You could try to use a headphone, but you would have to position it to where your telecoil is (can be awkward).

For users who don't have a hearing aid: You can use either an earbud (if you don't have a hearing aid) or a headphone (just like a normal person) and in addition, the sound will be amplified through the assistive listening device.

You do have the right to request an assistive listening device under the Americans with Disabilities Act, because the ADA specifies effective communication. It is best to call or check out the facility beforehand or talk to the person in charge (movie theatre, play, conference room, classroom) to see if there is one available. If this is related to a training or job, you can also talk with your local Vocational Rehabilitation office about obtaining funding for this (this is by a case-by-case basis). The best thing you can do is advocate for the facility to provide an assistive listening system, even if they don't have one. You can refer them to us if you would like (pass out the business card that we have available), and we can point them in the right direction.

OTHER ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY:

CapTel - The Captioned Telephone works like any other telephone with one important addition: It displays every word the caller says throughout the conversation. CapTel users can listen to the caller, and can also read the written captions in the CapTel's bright display window. To learn more, go to: <http://www.federalcaptel.us/index.php>. You can also obtain this through the Technology Distribution Access Program (TDAP) link below.

Web CapTel – WebCapTel lets you enjoy telephone conversations with the convenience of online captions. You make / receive phone calls using any phone you want, while viewing captions of the call in the Internet browser window on your computer. It's just like a traditional CapTel phone call, only you use your own phone (any phone!) and watch the captions online instead of in the CapTel display screen. This is offered by Sprint Relay or Hamilton Relay. For more information, go to: <http://www.federalcaptel.us/webcaptel.php>

Some of the assistive technology in our **demonstration kit** available at the meetings:

- **Pocket Talker** – Amplifier (not FM system) that can be used for one-to-one conversations or in small groups as well as for TV and radio listening.
- **Sound Wizard** – similar technology as Pocket Talker, but different design.
- **In-line phone amplifier** – install between the phone handset and the actual phone itself to get boost in amplification. (Note: Will not work for cordless phones)
- **Coupling devices** (i.e. silhouettes (HATIS) & neckloops that you use with assistive devices)
- **Sonic Alert products** (Sonic Boom alarm clock, signaling devices)
- **Strobe light** fire alarm
- **Amplified phone** (with bedshaker auxiliary jack, lamp alert)

You can apply and obtain some of these devices and more on a permanent loan basis through Telecommunication Devices Access Program (TDAP). You must have a hearing loss in moderate to severe to profound range. For more information, download an application, and see available products, go to: <http://www.oregon.gov/PUC/rspf/tdap.shtml>

A sample of websites (informational & online catalogues) to check out assistive technology:

Beyond Hearing Aids: <http://www.beyondhearingaids.com>

Harris Communications (you can get 15% discount off selected items): www.harriscomm.com

HearMore: <http://www.hearmore.com/store/default.asp>

Williams Sound: <http://www.williamssound.com/>

National Center for Hearing Assistive Technology: <http://www.hearingloss.org/learn/hat.asp>

A **local resource** for looking at additional assistive devices – Hearing Resources (website: <http://www.earlink.com>). Store address is: 4311 NE Tillamook St., Portland, OR 97213 and open Monday-Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Bluetooth – this is an industry-wide term for devices to communicate between each other wirelessly (or “hands-free) in short range. This advanced technology has caught up with hearing aids so to allow them to talk on cell phones “hands-free”. Note that this technology is not related to the telecoil nor does it replace the telecoil (you would still use the telecoil the same way you use wired devices). A couple of good articles on Bluetooth:

- Mark Ross, PhD : Bluetooth and Hearing Aids: Ready for prime time?
<http://www.hearinglossweb.com/tech/ha/cony/wrls/blue.htm>
- Buzzle.com - Bluetooth Hearing Aids: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/bluetooth-hearing-aids.html>