

LIVING WELL WITH HEARING LOSS

Technologies That Are Making a Difference

BY KATHERINE BOUTON



Do we really need another book about hearing loss? That's what I asked myself as I published my third book on the subject last October, titled *Smart Hearing: Strategies, Skills, and Resources for Living Better with Hearing Loss*.

I think the answer is yes, for a number of reasons.

Hearing aid technology is advancing so rapidly that what was an exciting new development a few years ago is now routinely available.

Made for iPhone hearing aids, for instance, were first introduced in 2014 by ReSound and Starkey. ReSound's LiNX was the first to allow streaming from an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch without the need for a streamer. Starkey came out with a Made for iPhone at about the same time. Now, virtually every hearing aid manufacturer has a Made for iPhone hearing aid, including Costco brands.

When the ReSound LiNX came out in 2014, I wanted one. But my hearing was bad enough that the sound quality wasn't sufficient. Made for iPhone aids are now available for people with severe-to-profound hearing loss. I have one, and I hear better on the phone than I have in 50 years. I can listen to podcasts and recorded books and understand almost every word.

This summer, the first Made for Android hearing aid will be released. Google and ReSound partnered to produce this first Made for Android aid, the LiNX Quattro. Other manufacturers are sure to follow.

It was possible to listen to a smartphone via a streamer before the direct technology came on the market. But these new phones come with another benefit: You can change the programs and volume on your iPhone with an app for your smartphone. It's much easier than finding the button on the hearing aid for program changes and then scrolling through them until you get the right one.



Hearing Assistive Technology Is Advancing Too

My new hearing aid came with a clip-on mic meant for use with one other person in a noisy place. I find it picks up two or three voices if I put it on the table in a quiet place. The biggest benefit for me personally is that my Pilates teacher can clip it onto her clothing, and for the first time ever, I can understand what's being said. Up until now, I'd always basically followed what others did. But since I'm also nearsighted, that was a less-than-perfect solution. The first time I used the mini mic in class, I was amazed—and also a little saddened—to realize how much I'd missed over the years.

Hearing aid technology is advancing so rapidly that what was an exciting new development a few years ago is now routinely available.

But perhaps the most important reason to publish a new book is personal. Over the past few years, I've learned so much more than I ever dreamed possible about how to live with hearing loss—and how to live well with it. It gives me pleasure to share my hard-earned knowledge.

Other manufacturers offer mini mics similar to mine. The Phonak Roger Pen, which can be used with any brand of cochlear implant or hearing aid with an adapter, features clip-on mics as well.

Induction looping is finally becoming a reality for many people. The HLAA New York City Chapter has a list of literally hundreds of looped spaces on its website. City Hall is now looped, and all new or renovated city-financed buildings with a baseline cost of \$950,000 or more are required to provide one looped meeting room.

CART captioning (Communication Access Realtime Translation) also is being recognized for the universal hearing tool that it is. Everyone can use CART. You don't need a hearing aid with a telecoil, or a hearing aid at all for that matter. Many Deaf people who use American Sign Language also welcome CART captions.

There's An App for That

One of the newest apps is Google's Live Transcribe, which is now available on Android phones. It's an accessibility app designed for people with hearing loss, but anyone can use it. Google explains Live Transcribe this way: "Using Google's state-of-the-art automatic speech recognition technology, Live Transcribe performs real-time transcription of speech to text on your screen, so you can more easily participate in conversations going on in the world around you. You can also keep the conversation going by typing your response on the screen." Live Transcribe uses cloud-based automatic speech recognition. You can review the conversation before closing the app to see if you missed anything.

InnoCaption has recently been rereleased as InnoCaption+. This app allows you to make and receive calls on your smartphone with live captioning by live captioners (not voice recognition like most apps). If you have a Made for iPhone hearing aid, the sound goes directly to your hearing aid, which means you can have the phone in front of you to read the captions. Voicemail messages also are transcribed into captions. The iPhone microphone is at the bottom, so you have to be careful not to cover that up.

Other apps can act as a hearing aid substitute. For the iPhone, these include the Jacoti ListenApp and EarMachine. Apps that've been around for a while

include Ava for speech-to-text in conversation, Dragon Dictation and Siri dictation. Using the microphone icon on your iPhone with email, text or notes also will create simultaneous captions.

As I discuss in my book, there also are apps to measure restaurant noise. There are several of these, and they work on the principle of crowdsourcing. The user goes into a restaurant and turns on the app, which records the time and decibel level. The information is then entered into a database, similar to Yelp, so others who are considering going to that restaurant can see how loud it is.

Another new app is meant to be used in live theater. GalaPro already is available for all Broadway plays and is spreading to theaters across the country. The app on your mobile device (or a device provided by the theater) provides pre-entered captioning of the show. A human monitor makes sure the captions stay synced. CART also might be provided for additional live features of a show.

Awareness Is Increasing

In New York City, where I live, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) has a list of disability coordinators in every agency. A list of disability coordinators for each city agency can be found on our website at hearinglossnyc.org under "Resources."

Most movie theaters have some kind of hearing access. Many of us prefer captioning, and that's available in Regal Cinemas, AMC Theatres and some others, either as special glasses or as a cup-holder device.

You're probably still going to have to ask for hearing access at public events, but venues increasingly know what CART is and how to find a CART provider.

Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids Are Coming

This is one piece of news that most people seem to have heard. But there's a lot of confusion around over-the-counter hearing aids.

An over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aid, a "basic" hearing aid, is expected to cost \$1,000 or less and to be recommended for adults with age-related mild-to-moderate hearing loss. On August 18, 2017, the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 was signed into law. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a lengthy review period, during which interested parties may comment. The specifics

of the FDA definition of an over-the-counter hearing aid won't be clear until that comment period is over.

Nevertheless, a lot of people will tell you they're already selling an over-the-counter hearing aid. They're selling a device, not a hearing aid. To call a device a hearing aid, it must have FDA clearance. That doesn't mean there aren't some good devices available, and I write about them in my book. But buyer beware: You usually get what you pay for. Not only can cheap hearing devices be ineffective, but they can damage your hearing.

Medicare and Other Health Insurance

Medicare doesn't cover hearing aids. Period. Consumer advocates like HLAA hope that the Medicare statute can be changed and are working to effect that change. But don't hold your breath.

There's been a bit of an improvement in other health care coverage for hearing aids. A survey conducted by the independent consumer review platform Hearing Tracker found that 25 percent of a group of 2,000 hearing aid users it surveyed in June 2018 had received some form of reimbursement for hearing aids. This is an area where change happens quickly, but not always for the better. The survey, which I participated in, reveals a number of fascinating facts and trends in hearing aid

use, and I discuss them at some length in my book.

All these social and technological advances are covered in *Smart Hearing: Strategies, Skills, and Resources for Living Better with Hearing Loss* in much more detail than I can offer here. But perhaps the most important reason to publish a new book is personal. Over the past few years, I've learned so much more than I ever dreamed possible about how to live with hearing loss—and how to live well with it. It gives me pleasure to share my hard-earned knowledge. I hope I can make the journey easier for others. **HL**



Katherine Bouton is the author of Shouting Won't Help: Why I—and 50 Million Other Americans—Can't Hear You. Smart Hearing: Strategies, Skills, and Resources for Living Better with Hearing Loss is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) as a paperback or e-book. She's a

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