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Hearing Aid Compatibility With Cell Phones

To ensure everyone benefits from advances in technology, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has approved standards and passed regulations for cell phone use with hearing aids.

Q. What does hearing aid compatibility mean?

A. Hearing aid compatibility (HAC) for cell phones and other wireless devices is defined by two areas of performance. A cell phone that is HAC has a reduced likelihood of causing interference noise in hearing aids. In addition, a cell phone that is HAC may also be capable of working with a hearing aid's telecoil. HAC cell phones are designed to work with hearing aids that have some level of built-in protection against the interference that cell phones may cause.

Q. How do I know if my hearing aids will work with a HAC cell phone?

A. The hearing aid industry has voluntarily committed to manufacturing new hearing aids with an interference protection rating of 2 or better (up to 4) in both microphone and telecoil listening modes. Hearing aids with a rating of at least 2 should provide a normal use experience when coupled to hearing aid compatible cell phones, which means the likelihood of consumers hearing interference noise has been reduced. To determine the rating of a particular hearing aid model, audiologists or hearing instrument specialists will need to inquire with the device's manufacturer. Hearing aid manufacturer websites may also contain this information. The hearing aids themselves and accompanying product literature will not contain the rating information.

Q. Are all cell phones hearing aid compatible?

A. Not all cell phones are hearing aid compatible. However, wireless manufacturers and service providers do offer many wireless devices that are HAC. The FCC has set minimum requirements for the number of HAC cell phones both manufacturers and service providers must offer. If you have a hearing aid or cochlear implant, you should look for wireless devices with hearing aid compatibility features.



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Q. How do I know if a cell phone is hearing aid compatible (HAC)?

A. Cell phones that are hearing aid compatible have packages labeled with “M” or “T” ratings. If you see the labels “M3”, “M4”, “T3” or “T4” on the box, then the cell phone has been designated as hearing aid compatible. Only phones that meet hearing aid compatibility performance requirements have packages labeled with these “M” or “T” ratings. Information about phones that meet these requirements is also shown on a phone’s display card in retail stores operated by the companies that provide cell phone service (service providers) and in the product’s manual or packaging insert. If you have questions about the rating of a cell phone, ask your service provider or device manufacturer for more information.

Q. What does “M” on the label mean?

A. “M” refers to the cell phone’s rating for its interference potential. The higher the “M” rating of the phone the more likely it is you will be able to use the phone with your hearing aid on the microphone setting. Hearing aid users who listen on a cell phone in microphone mode should consider the “M” rating.

Q. What does “T” on the label mean?

A. “T” refers to the cell phone’s ability to couple with a hearing aid’s telecoil. The higher the “T” rating of the phone the more likely it is you will be able to use the phone with your hearing aid on the telecoil setting. Hearing aid users who listen on a cell phone in telecoil mode should consider the “T” rating.

Q. What is a telecoil?

A. telecoil is a small device that is built into some hearing aids for use with the telephone as well as assistive listening devices. To use the telecoil, generally either the hearing aid is switched to the “T” position or a button on the

hearing aid is pushed to select the telecoil program. The telecoil picks up magnetic fields generated by telephones and converts these fields into sound. Telecoils are particularly useful for telephone communication because they permit the volume control of a hearing aid to be turned up without creating feedback or “whistling,” and background noise can be reduced especially when using cell phones in noisy places.



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Q. Is there anything special I need to do in order for my cell phone to be hearing aid compatible?

A. In order for some hearing aid compatible phones to work best with a hearing aid user's telecoil, the consumer must use the phone's menu system to select and turn on the hearing aid compatibility feature for telecoil use. Check with the service provider and product literature to determine if the phone you're interested in has this menu selectable feature. If hearing aid wearers use microphone mode for cell phone listening, then they should not turn on this feature.

Q. Does meeting the HAC performance requirements guarantee that I will be able to use a HAC cell phone with my hearing aid?

A. While there is no guarantee; phones that meet HAC performance requirements should improve usability for hearing aid users.

Q. Who manufactures wireless devices that have been approved by the FCC as hearing aid compatible?

A. All major handset manufacturers offer HAC cell phones and may also offer handsfree accessories to improve usability.

Q. May I try cell phones before I buy one?

A. Yes, service provider (carrier) retail stores are required by the FCC to provide a way for consumers to test hearing aid compatible cell phones. Hearing loss and hearing aids are highly individualized so it is advisable to try cell phones with your hearing aid in the store before making your cell phone purchase, even if you plan to make your purchase online. It's best to try several phones before buying to find the best match with your hearing aids. Visit a full-service carrier store and ask to try phones that have been designated as "hearing aid compatible." For telecoil users, it's important to inquire whether phones you plan to try have a hearing aid compatibility menu feature that should be turned on during in-store testing.

Q. May I return the phone if it does not work for me after purchase?

A. Yes, but be sure to ask about and understand the return policy and early termination fees before signing up for any cell phone or service. Since a cell phone's interference potential can



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change depending on your location, your listening experience outside the store may be different than when you tried the cell phone in the store. If you need to return a phone because it does not work with your hearing device, be sure to do so during the return period and let the sales clerk know that you are a hearing device user and the reason for the return. A restocking fee should not be charged if you return the phone during the return period and give the reason for the return.

Q. Are HAC cell phones any different in appearance or cost from other cell phones?

A. No, the range of features and functions of cell phones will impact the price, but hearing aid compatibility will not. Service provider owned and operated stores offer a range of HAC phones with varying features and prices.

Q. What if I cannot find a cell phone that works with my hearing aid?

A. While FCC Hearing Aid Compatibility (HAC) regulations should improve cell phone usability for hearing aid users; some people still may not find a cell phone that works for them. You can check with your audiologist or hearing instrument specialist to determine if there is a hearing aid option for you that may work better with cell phones. Many new digital hearing aids are designed to be usable with hearing aid compatible cell phones. Some telecoil users may find that accessories, such as neckloops, may further assist with their use of cell phones and other wireless devices.

RESOURCES

Many people and organizations contribute to ensuring accessible communication is equally available for all individuals with disabilities including deaf and hard of hearing consumers. For more information visit:

- www.accesswireless.org
- www.fcc.gov/general/hearing-aid-compatibility-hac
- www.hearingloss.org

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