FAQs: Assistive devices

Here are answers to frequently asked questions about assistive listening and alerting devices that help people with all degrees of hearing loss live and communicate better.

Assistive devices: getting the door

Q: I have trouble hearing my doorbell but live in an apartment and don’t want to get an extra loud bell because this might disturb my neighbors. What can I do?

A: A common problem with doorbells is that the bell cannot be heard in a distant room. There are wireless doorbell systems in which the sound-producing element (or receiver) can be placed at a location far away from the doorbell (or transmitter) such as a bedroom, basement, or attic. In addition, it is possible to use multiple receivers that can produce sound in more than one location at the same time which can make it possible to hear the doorbell in different locations within the same house or apartment. Additionally, flashing light ALDs can also be used with remote receivers. These receivers can be plugged into other outlets in the house or apartment and have an outlet into which a lamp can be plugged. When the main unit is activated, the remote units will also be activated causing the lights that are plugged into them to flash.

Waking up is hard to do (without the right alarm clock)

Q: I can’t hear a regular alarm clock. What is available to help me wake up?

A: There are extra loud alarm clocks that can be used with a flashing light and/or a bed shaker. In addition, there is a small battery-operated vibrating alarm clock that can be placed under the pillow or mattress and is especially useful for people who travel.

Is someone at the door—or on the phone?

Q: If I want to have a remote unit flash a light when the phone or doorbell rings and the light flashes, how do I tell whether my phone is ringing or there is someone at the door?

A: The rhythm of the flashing will be very different depending on whether the telephone is ringing or there is someone at the door. This way, it is very easy to tell them apart. Also, there are some alerting systems that will show on their base unit an indicator light that will let you know exactly what the condition is.

Q: Are there alarm devices that can be used with body-worn receivers?

A: Body-worn receivers are available which will vibrate and indicate the nature of the alarm condition. In addition, there are units specially designed to be used by people that are deaf-blind.
Assistive device fire alarms

Q: What are some smoke alarm ALD issues?

A: There are two options for smoke and carbon monoxide safety. Both options can be used as part of a complete alerting system and are usually wireless making installation easy.

The first would be to make existing traditional smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors accessible by installing a sound monitoring device mounted close to the detector(s). When the detector sounds its alarm, the sound monitor “hears” the sound of the detector and will then send a signal to a receiver in order to signal a bed shaker or flash a strobe light or lamp.

The second option is to use specific smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. These detectors will show on their base unit, indicator lights that will let you know exactly what the condition is.

All about telephones and assistive devices

Q: I’d like to get a louder telephone – what’s out there?

A: There are a number of possibilities – you may be able to make your present telephone louder by adding an amplifier. There are complete telephones available with built-in amplification. These usually have other useful features as well such as a tone control, an extra loud ring, and a flashing light.

Q: What is a T coil?

A: T coil, T-Switch, or Telephone coil is a small coil of wire within a hearing aid that is activated by a switch on the hearing aid. A T coil allows a hearing aid to pick up a phone signal directly. It also prevents feedback and cuts out surrounding noise when making a phone call. A telephone whose earpiece emits a magnetic field that can be easily picked up by a hearing aid T coil is called “hearing aid compatible.” The T coil can also be used to easily and conveniently enable a hearing aid to work with various other types of ALDs.

Q: Can I do anything to make my existing phone louder?

A: There is a portable snap-on telephone amplifier that can be used with virtually any telephone however it may have to be attached and then removed each time the phone is used so that the phone can hang up properly. Inline telephone amplifiers are also available, which can be used with corded phones that do not have a keypad in the handset. These can be attached to just about any phone and can be left in place.
Q: What about cordless phones?

A: There are cordless phones with built-in extra amplification that are available. In addition, some of them have jacks that can be used with a hands-free accessory. Some models also have a special jack into which special accessories such as a neckloop can be plugged into.

Q: I travel a lot and sometimes have trouble using local telephones – any suggestions?

A: Many travelers find the portable snap-on telephone amplifiers very useful. In addition, this device can also be used to turn a non-hearing aid compatible telephone into one that is hearing aid compatible.

Q: Can I use a cell phone (or smartphone) with my hearing aid?

A: Most cell phones or smartphones today are hearing aid compatible and assigned a compatibility rating. Some people won’t need assistive devices other than what the phone’s already capable of. Cell phone ratings of M3, T3, M4, or T4 are the most compatible with hearing aids. Hearing aid manufacturers in newer product lines (within the last 5 years) make devices that can link the hearing aid directly to your cell phone wirelessly. “Connectivity” within hearing aids is typically proprietary. Please consult with your audiologist if your hearing aids have this capability.

Q: My neighbors complain that I have my television on too loud. What can I do?

A: One solution is to watch your favorite show with real-time captioning. If you own a television purchased after 1994, the set will have captioning capabilities. For those with moderate hearing loss, infrared transmitters and receivers or the use of a personal listener with an extension for the microphone work well. In addition to these devices, hearing aid manufacturers have made proprietary devices that can link your hearing aids directly to television and other audio devices directly and wirelessly. This technology does require a specific type of hearing aid. Check with your audiologist to see if your hearing aids are compatible with these devices.

Q: I wear a hearing aid and have a particularly difficult time in noisy situations—what can I do?

A: Anything that will bring the speaker closer to your hearing aid will significantly improve this situation. Wireless FM systems are one of the most typically used assistive devices in these situations. FM can be attached to hearing aids wirelessly or wired depending on the type of hearing aid that you have.

Q: What devices are available at the theater or the movies?

A: Wireless headsets (either infrared or FM) are usually available at theaters as assistive devices for patrons. Some individuals choose to buy their own headsets or receivers to be used at home as well. In addition to various listening systems, some movie theaters and some live theater present special performances or showings that are captioned.
Q: I use a cochlear implant – what can I do to connect to external devices?

A: There are special cords known as patch cords that are available. Patch cords allow you to connect a telephone or other device directly to your cochlear implant processor if it has an external audio input jack.

Q: Where can I see and try different ALDs?

A: The Center for Hearing and Communication is able to give a free device demonstration. Please schedule a private consultation by contacting our appointment desk at 917-305-7766 (v) and completing the appointment request form.