

## Information for Purchasing a Cell Phone

Thanks to the efforts of individuals like you, individuals with hearing loss advocating for services and educating legislators about the needs of individuals with hearing loss, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has instituted regulations for cell phone manufacturers and retailers to accommodate needs of individuals with hearing loss. This article is intended for an audience of beginning to intermediate users. More information can be found on a wonderful new website [www.accesswireless.org](http://www.accesswireless.org) operated by "CTIA - The Wireless Association" or visit [www.phonescoop.com](http://www.phonescoop.com).

**Research:** Educate yourself before you go to the store. **First**, you need to know the rating of your hearing aid. That can be the tough part as the FCC has regulated the cell phone industry to comply with the rating system, but not hearing aids. Check with your hearing aid dealer or manufacturer to obtain the hearing aid compatibility rating for your hearing aid(s). **Secondly**, check the websites from the manufacturers (LG, Motorola, Samsung, Sanyo, etc.) and service providers (AT&T, Sprint, TMobile, Verizon, etc.) to get familiar with what is available before you go to the store. If you're not a big user of wireless service, investigate the ability to be added to an existing phone plan with a trusted friend or family member to share expenses. **Thirdly**, select a store that is backed by a manufacturer or cell phone provider rather than a third-party retailer. The retail stores that are supported by the manufacturer or service providers generally have better return policies so you can more easily return the phone within the policy guidelines if you are not satisfied. To ensure you are working with a store supported by the manufacturer or service provider, go to their website and search for a store nearest you. If you do not have access to the internet, at least call and asked if they are supported by the larger corporation.

**Phone Shapes:** Individuals using the clam-shell shaped phones that fold closed report less electronic "buzz" as the electronics are by the keyboard which is further from the hearing aid. The other type is the stick or candy bar flat shape.

**Rating System and Compatibility: Hearing aid compatibility (HAC)** on wireless devices (cell phones) can now be measured by a new rating system. HAC ratings on wireless devices are listed as "M" for use in microphone mode on your hearing aid, or as "T" for Telecoil mode compatibility. The minimum rating is M3 in microphone mode and T3 in telecoil mode for devices to be considered hearing aid compatible. The rating for a minimum HAC phone would be: M3/T3.

**Microphone or Telecoil Mode:** If you're planning to use a wireless device with your hearing aid in microphone mode, the higher the "M" number the better. If you're planning to use the device in telecoil mode, the higher the "T" number the better. Once you know the HAC for your hearing

aid(s), and your plans to use in microphone or telecoil mode, then select devices that help you get the highest combined number. See the chart below:

Example Number	Mode you plan to use	Hearing Aid Rating	Cell Phone Rating	Potential Effectiveness in THAT MODE
1	Microphone	<b>M3/T4</b>	<b>M4/T4</b>	M = 7
2		<b>M4/T3</b>	<b>M4/T3</b>	M = 8
3		<b>M4/T4</b>	<b>M3/T4</b>	M = 7
4		<b>M3/T3</b>	<b>M3/T3</b>	M = 6
5	Telecoil	<b>M3/T4</b>	<b>M4/T4</b>	T = 8
6		<b>M4/T3</b>	<b>M4/T3</b>	T = 6
7		<b>M4/T4</b>	<b>M3/T3</b>	T = 7
8		<b>M3/T3</b>	<b>M3/T4</b>	T = 7

In the chart above, the higher the combined total for the mode you plan to use the device is best. It shows that if you plan to use a phone in microphone mode, example #2 would be one of the phones you would choose to try. If you're using the device with telecoil, you would want to try #5.

However, the chart does not take into consideration if the keyboard is the type you like, the screen size, the size of the keys, the brightness or other features you may need or want.

**FM/Blue Tooth:** Many new cell phones include Blue Tooth technology which opens your choices to a myriad of other options using induction coil or neckloop. Blue tooth technology is widely used by people without hearing loss, but can be used with the neckloop to provide excellent clarity and hands-free use. Often individuals who have found it difficult to hear using the microphone mode find the clarity of using telecoil and neckloop a great advantage.

**Text, email, and internet access:** Some people use email and text more than they use the voice-to-voice telephone. Although this is a paradigm shift for those of us who grew up with rotary phones, don't discount the ability to stay in contact with friends, family and co-workers through email and text as it has additional emerging capabilities. Do you know some medical devices can be monitored in your home by your doctor through the internet? Some day we may be voting for politicians through text messages like voting for your favorite TV star. Today cell phones are used for games, education, health care, financial transactions, emergency alerts and disaster relief.

I have personally experienced situations in buildings with thick walls, medical facilities, or remote locations that I could not get cell phone service, while I could still send and receive text or email. If your phone comes with these additional services, consider a small package with a limited amount of usage to try it with your friends, co-workers and family. Ask the sales person what it would cost to add a small package for these services versus the cost of a voice-only plan and whether you could cancel that portion after a while.

**Go Shopping:** You have done your research, you have an idea of the type of service and cell phone you are interested in, you have selected a store supported by a large company. Now what? Don't go on a day when they stores are packed, go when the sales people will have more time to help you. If your sales person does not seem to be familiar with phones for people with hearing loss, ask for someone who is a little more familiar. If that person is not there, come back when they will be.

**Test at the Store:** Everyone's hearing loss is different and everyone's needs are different. You have to try the phones to find the one that works best for you. Try making calls in the store, try placing calls and having a real discussion with someone asking questions and giving answers to ensure you really understand. A quick "Hi, it's me" isn't quite enough. Listen to the ring tone options to ensure you will be able to hear it ring. Ask the sales person to give you a few minutes to make calls on your own to ensure you can operate it without their assistance. Ask about upgradability, as new services are created can applications be added to this phone to keep up with technology.

**Read and Understand the Return Policy:** Make it clear you are looking for a device that works with your hearing aid and that you intend to bring it back if it does not work well. Read and understand the conditions of the return policy before you sign on the dotted line. Retain the packaging and materials from the device in case you have to return it.

**Try the Phone within the Return Policy Period:** Let's say the return policy is 30 days. Often a cell phone will work great in the store, but then you get it home and have problems with reception. Once you get it home and charge it, try it in every conceivable environment and every situation you may encounter within those first 30 days. Use it in the car, at work, in the mountains, in the basement, go on a trip - try everything you can think of to test the various capabilities of the phone and the service provider in real life situations. Try the ring tones, make sure you can hear it in your pocket, purse, etc. If service coverage is the issue, you may want to consider switching service providers to one that uses a different satellite network.

**Living with Hearing Loss:** Many people think using a hearing aid is like putting on a pair of glasses - it makes everything clear and fine. But hearing aids come with their own set of issues. There is grief that comes with hearing loss. Hearing loss can have an impact on relationships, independence, on every aspect of one's life. If you or someone you know are struggling with hearing loss, the Sanderson Center offers free classes based on the Living with Hearing Loss classes developed by Sam Trychin, Ph.D. These classes are beneficial to help people cope with the grief of hearing loss, learn beneficial techniques and behavioral changes to alleviate communication breakdowns, and about assistive technology to reduce background noise. Also visit the Hearing Loss Association of America's website at [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org) for support, information and resources.