

## Hooked on Phones

By: Cindy Shapiro

Harry Potter's owl-tooled and "wanded" world may not need a telephone to get a message swiftly to friends Hermione and Ron, but we Muggles (humans) regardless of level of hearing, have yet to cut all our telephone cords. Although many of us have discovered the internet as a communication tool, even devoted e-mailers find reasons to fall back on using the telephone. A call to a doctor, dentist, plumber or pizza outfit, not to mention the possibility of a genuine emergency, is sufficient reason to stay connected to our telephonic culture.

This short discussion will graze the surface of the large and ever-changing pool of phone options for persons with hearing loss. Combined with the variety of phone choices, there are many types and degrees of hearing loss. This means that consumers should consider many factors when choosing a phone to meet their needs. The long and short of it is that one size does not fit all.

**HOW MUCH AMPLIFICATION IS ENOUGH?** The unit for measuring the loudness of sound is a decibel (dB). For those who have a mild or moderate hearing loss, a boost of up to 25 decibels is usually enough. A severe or profound hearing loss in the important speech frequencies may require a louder phone, one that delivers 30 to 48 dBs of sound, for example. A word of caution, louder is not always clearer. Using a hearing aid's T -coil with a hearing aid compatible phone may provide sufficient amplification and clarity without requiring maximum loudness.

**Hearing aid users are advised to ask their hearing care provider for information about the benefits and costs of using a hearing aid with a T-coil (also called a telecoil or T -switch or telephone switch). Hearing aids with T -coils can be used with other wireless and hardwired hearing amplification systems as well as with hearing aid compatible phones. Select cell phones can be used with a T-coil. The T -coil allows the user to hear through the hearing aid, which is tailored to one's hearing loss, rather than having to remove the hearing aid in order to use the phone.**

**Neckloop: A loop of wire that goes around the neck and plugs into an audio output jack. The neckloop generates a magnetic field that transmits sound directly to T -coil equipped hearing aids.**

**Silhouette: A small, flat, plastic encased induction mechanism that plugs into a jack and is placed between a behind the ear (BTE) hearing aid and the head. The silhouette transmits sound directly to a T-coil equipped hearing aid.**

**DO YOU HAVE AT-COIL ON YOUR HEARING AID?** With a T-coil, you can use neckloops or silhouettes to enhance the quality and volume of the sound from the phone, if the phone is hearing aid compatible and/or if the phone has the appropriate audio output jack.

### **Jacks on Phones**

**There are two types of jacks and plugs for connecting accessories to phones. The larger jack (1/8 inch or 3.5mm size) called an audio output jack, audio jack or neckloop jack accepts neckloops, silhouettes -f and headphones.**

**The second type of jack (3/32 inch or 2.5mm size) accepts accessories that contain a small microphone which is added to a silhouette or headset/earphone, allowing for hands free operation. Only HATIS brand is known to offer a silhouette-microphone combination at this time.**

**Reminder: The hearing aid's T-coil needs to be "on" when using a neckloop or silhouette.**

DO YOU HEAR SOME SOUNDS BETTER THAN OTHERS? Some people can improve their understanding of telephone conversations by using a phone that features tone/pitch adjustments.

DO YOU WANT TO USE A PERSONAL LISTENING SYSTEM WHEN USING THE PHONE? A device called the "telelink" allows users to connect their standard home phone to a hearing amplification device, be it an FM system such as a Comtek, Listen, Phonak, Seinheisser or William Sound, or a hardwired Pocketalker or SounDirector. The telelink works with standard phones (cord connected to receiver) where the keypad is separate from the handset.

**DOES THE NATURE OF YOUR HEARING LOSS REQUIRE TEXT BASED COMMUNICATION?** Residual (what's left) hearing may suffice in face to face conversations but hard of hearing people may require a text-based format for all or some of their telephone communications. (See article on page 6.) The Michigan Relay Center (MRC) provides deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired phone users with a relay system for text-based phone information. Check out the following website for available relay services in Michigan: <http://www.michiganrelay.com>

**When choosing a phone** you have to decide your priorities. The following checklist may be useful.

- Degree of amplification
- Tone adjuster
- Cordless or corded phone option
- Use of accessories and their corresponding jacks
- Size of keypad for easy keypunching
- Cost

Finding the right phone can lead to more independence and an improved quality of life for persons with hearing loss. Time spent investigating and exploring phone options and possibilities can reap many rewards.

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