

Can You Hear Us Now? Assistive Technology for Hearing Loss

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Depression, paranoia, poor self-esteem, anger, confusion and social isolation . . . How would you like that brutal reality staring you in the face every morning? Unfortunately many hearing impaired people in their late 50's and older experience some or all of these feelings, as a result of hearing loss. However, there is hope. Assistive listening technology has made huge strides from when our Aunt Martha sat in the corner with the TV so loud the house shook. Some people still act like Aunt Martha, but no one has to anymore, no one! I know; I've been wearing hearing aids for more than 30 years. The innovations in assistive listening technology have been astounding. The following is an overview of what is available with resources for you to learn more on your own. As always, we are available by phone or email if you have questions.

Hearing Aids – Consider this: a hearing *loss* is more obvious than a hearing aid. If you need a hearing aid, your friends and family already know it! Today there are so many hearing aid styles it is hard to keep up with what is available. There are *digital hearing aids* which produce excellent speech sounds and are often better at reducing environmental noise, and of course there are *analog aids* which have also seen many changes. In some cases it is difficult to tell the difference in sound quality between digital and analog aids. It often depends on the person wearing the aids. We are all different.

Hearing aids come in many shapes and sizes. There are completely “in the canal aids” that you literally cannot see as they are placed deep in your ear. There are also “in the canal aids” that fit in your ear and can be seen. There are the “behind the ear” aids that well, fit behind your ear. There are advantages to all styles. Usually the smaller the aid, the more it costs. Digital aids generally cost more than analog aids. “Behind the ear” aids are the easiest to put batteries in and provide easy access for volume adjustment.

Hearing aids now are being offered with several *microphones* and *listening channels*. You simply press a button on your remote and your hearing aid can turn off one set of microphones and turn on another when you are in a crowded restaurant. Many of these hearing aids have programs for listening to music or watching TV or talking on the telephone.

All hearing aids take an adjustment period. Be a smart consumer and request a 30 day free trial. Unfortunately Medicaid does not pay for hearing aids in Arizona, but some insurance companies do.

Cochlear Implants - Some people find that even today's powerful hearing aids just don't provide enough help. Many of these people qualify for a cochlear implant. A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted device that electrically stimulates nerve fibers and produces sensations recognized by the brain as speech. It is effective? People all

over the world who could no longer understand conversation are now talking on the telephone and having normal conversations after receiving cochlear implants.

Assistive Devices for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - The number of products that enable us to be more independent is almost unlimited. Here are just a few:

- **Vibrating alarm clock** – Can't hear the alarm? This will shake you awake!
- **Flashing smoke detectors** – A bright strobe light flashes as the alarm sounds.
- **Captioned TV** – All television sets made after July 1993 have the built-in ability to provide captioned TV (where speech is displayed as text at the bottom of the screen. The option is usually found in the television menu.

- **Assistive listening devices**

For theaters – By law all movie theaters must supply headphones (free) with volume control for people who are hard of hearing

For television – Wireless headphones with volume control for television viewing

For noisy environments such as restaurants, meeting, group activities

For private conversations with doctors, clergy, financial business

Hearing Dogs – An increasing number of deaf and hard of hearing people are using specially trained Hearing Dogs to alert them when the telephone rings or when someone is at the door. Hearing dogs are permitted to go anywhere in public just like Seeing Eye dogs for people who are blind.

Find out all about hearing aids and more at - <http://www.earinfo.com/>

Learn more about what products are available at AZ Hearing - <http://azhearing.com/>

Harris Communications has a vast array of products - <http://www.Harriscomm.com>

Discover when a hearing dog may be a good idea - <http://www.dogsforthedeaf.org/>

This is the fourth in a series of articles designed to educate people about assistive technology and its benefits to older Arizonans. For more information, contact Randy Collins, Training and Outreach Coordinator for the Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP). Randy can be reached at 602.728.9533 Voice, 602.728.9536 TTY or toll free at 800.477.9921 Voice/TTY. The AzTAP website is www.nau.edu/ihd/aztap.

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DES, Aging and Adult Administration: Aging, if it's not your issue...it will be.