

Hearing Aids and Accessibility

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 Near the ear: works with any aid; quality depends on the phone's M and T ratings.
- 2 Telecoil: a coil in the aid picks up the earpiece directly, cutting background noise.
- 3 Bluetooth: newer aids pair wirelessly and the call streams right into your ears.
- 4 Many people use a mix — Bluetooth for calls, telecoil for places like theaters.

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Hearing Aid Compatibility and Accessibility Settings by Carrier

M and T ratings, Bluetooth pairing, streaming calls to your hearing aids, and the settings that help — explained plainly.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1714 · ACCESSIBILITY** —————

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1. Why Phones and Hearing Aids Need a Little Help

The two don't always get along on their own.

If you wear hearing aids and you've ever held a phone to your ear and gotten a whistle, a buzz, or a caller who sounds like they're underwater, you're not imagining it and you're not doing anything wrong. Phones and hearing aids are two pieces of sensitive electronics held right next to each other, and getting them to cooperate takes a little thought. The good news is that it's very solvable, and the tools to solve it have gotten dramatically better in the last few years.

This guide is about making calls easy again. We'll cover what to look for when you buy a phone so it works well with hearing aids in the first place, how newer aids connect over Bluetooth so the caller's voice goes straight into your ears, and the handful of settings on the phone that help whether your aids are brand new or a decade old.

A word before we start. I fix phones and set up technology; I am not an audiologist, and nothing here is medical advice. The settings and features in this guide are about the phone, not about your hearing itself. For anything to do with your aids, your hearing, or which features suit your particular hearing loss, your audiologist is the person to ask. They know your ears and your specific aids far better than any general guide can. Think of this as the phone half of the picture, meant to go alongside what your hearing professional tells you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Everything in this guide can be set up without changing anything about your hearing aids themselves. These are phone settings. If a feature needs something from the aids' side, I'll say so and point you to your audiologist.

2. The Two Ways a Phone Talks to a Hearing Aid

Near the ear, or wirelessly over Bluetooth.

There are really just two ways a phone and a hearing aid work together, and understanding the difference makes everything else in this guide click into place.

The first way is the old-fashioned way: you hold the phone up near your ear, and the hearing aid picks up the sound. This is where the phone's hearing aid 'ratings' matter, because the phone's own electronics can either interfere with the aid (that whistle or buzz)

or sit quietly and let the sound through cleanly. There's also a special mode called telecoil, where a tiny coil inside many hearing aids picks up the magnetic signal from the phone's earpiece directly, cutting out background noise. This near-the-ear approach works with any hearing aid and any phone, to varying degrees, and it's what the M and T ratings on a phone are all about.

The second way is the modern way: Bluetooth. Newer hearing aids can pair wirelessly with a phone, the same way wireless earbuds do. When they're paired, the caller's voice is sent straight into the hearing aids — no holding the phone to your ear at all. You can leave the phone on the table and the call plays in both aids. This is a genuine leap forward for people with hearing loss, and if your aids support it, it's usually the best way to take calls.

- Near the ear: works with any aid; quality depends on the phone's M and T ratings.
- Telecoil: a coil in the aid picks up the earpiece directly, cutting background noise.
- Bluetooth: newer aids pair wirelessly and the call streams right into your ears.
- Many people use a mix — Bluetooth for calls, telecoil for places like theaters.

WATCH OUT

You don't have to choose just one. A good setup often uses Bluetooth for everyday phone calls and keeps telecoil available for loop systems in churches, theaters, and counters that have them. Your audiologist can tell you what your aids include.

3. What the M and T Ratings Mean

Two little numbers that predict how well a phone behaves.

When a phone is tested for use with hearing aids, it gets two ratings, and they show up on the box, the spec sheet, or the maker's website. Knowing what they mean turns phone shopping from a guessing game into a quick check.

The M rating is for microphone mode — the normal way you hold a phone to your ear with the hearing aid's own microphone picking up the sound. The T rating is for telecoil mode — using that coil inside the aid to pick up the phone directly. For both ratings, the numbers run 3 and 4, and higher is better. A rating of 3 passes; a rating of 4 is the best. So an M4/T4 phone is about as hearing-aid-friendly as phones get, while an M3/T3 phone is fine for most people.

A phone is considered fully hearing aid compatible when it carries both an M and a T rating of 3 or 4. If you see only an M rating and no T rating, the phone will work for normal calls

but won't support telecoil — worth knowing if you rely on loop systems.

One recent change can cause confusion. Under a newer testing standard, some phones now carry a single label that just says 'Hearing Aid Compatible,' or HAC, rather than separate M and T numbers. That newer label is treated as roughly equal to the old M3/T3 — in other words, it passes. Most phones on store shelves still use the older separate-number system, so you'll see both styles for a while yet.

GOOD TO KNOW

These ratings predict how a phone behaves, but your actual experience also depends on your specific hearing aids and how well they shrug off interference. A rating is a good starting filter; your own ears, and your audiologist's advice, are the final word.

4. Checking the Rating Before You Buy

Where to find it, and what to ask.

You don't have to be an expert to buy a hearing-aid-friendly phone. You just have to know where the rating lives and ask one or two questions.

Carriers are required to make the hearing aid rating available for the phones they sell, and most list it right on the product page online, usually down in the specifications or a tab labeled accessibility or hearing aid compatibility. In a store, the rating is often on a card by the display or in the box; if you can't find it, ask the salesperson directly — 'What's the hearing aid rating on this one?' is a perfectly normal question and they can look it up.

- Online, look under the phone's specifications or an accessibility tab for the M and T ratings.
- In a store, ask the salesperson to look up the hearing aid rating for the model you're considering.
- Aim for M3/T3 or better; M4/T4 is best if you have a choice.
- If you use telecoil or loop systems, make sure there's a T rating, not just an M.
- If your aids are Bluetooth, ask whether the phone supports Made for iPhone or Android's hearing aid streaming, which matters more than the near-ear rating.

If your hearing aids connect over Bluetooth, the M and T ratings matter a little less, because you won't be holding the phone to your ear as often. In that case the more important question is whether the phone pairs well with your particular aids — which brings us to the next few pages. The best move of all is to bring your own hearing aids to the store and test a call before you commit, or ask about the return window so you can try it at home.

TIP

Before you buy, ask your audiologist which phones pair cleanly with your model of hearing aid. Aid makers often publish a compatibility list, and your audiologist usually knows from experience which phones their patients do well with.

5. Telecoil and Loop Systems

An old technology that still does something nothing else does.

Telecoil — the T in those ratings — is worth understanding because it does something even fancy Bluetooth can't always match. A telecoil is a tiny copper coil built into many hearing aids. Instead of picking up sound through the air with a microphone, it picks up an electrical signal directly, which means it skips all the background noise in the room.

On a phone, switching your aid to telecoil mode (your audiologist sets up how you do that) lets it pull the caller's voice straight from the earpiece, clear of room noise. But the place telecoil really shines is loop systems. Many churches, theaters, senior centers, pharmacy counters, and ticket windows have a 'hearing loop' installed — a wire around the room that broadcasts the sound system directly to any telecoil-equipped hearing aid in range. You flip your aid to telecoil, and suddenly the speaker's voice or the service is in your ears clearly, as if you had headphones on, with none of the echo and crowd noise.

You'll often see a blue sign with an ear symbol and a 'T' marking places that have a loop. If you have telecoil in your aids, it costs nothing to use and it can transform a hard-to-hear room into an easy one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not every hearing aid has a telecoil, and the smallest in-the-ear models sometimes leave it out for space. If loop systems or clear phone calls matter to you, ask your audiologist whether your aids have telecoil before you assume they do.

6. Bluetooth Hearing Aids on iPhone

Made for iPhone, and why Apple does this well.

Apple has supported hearing aids directly for years through a program called Made for iPhone. If your hearing aids carry that label — your audiologist or the aid's box will tell you — they connect to an iPhone with no extra gadget in between. The caller's voice, music, directions, and alerts all stream straight into your aids.

Apple treats hearing aids as a built-in part of the phone, not just another Bluetooth accessory, which means there's a dedicated place in the settings to control them, and the connection tends to be stable and battery-friendly. Once they're paired, taking a call is as simple as answering — the sound goes to your aids automatically.

Made for iPhone aids also unlock some of the nicest features we'll cover later: adjusting your aids right from the phone, and Live Listen, which turns the iPhone into a little microphone you can set near a person or a television. If you're an iPhone household and shopping for new aids, asking specifically for Made for iPhone compatibility is worth doing.

- Made for iPhone aids pair directly to the phone, no extra device needed.
- Calls, music, and alerts stream straight into both aids.
- A dedicated hearing section in Settings lets you control them.
- This also enables Live Listen and on-phone adjustments, covered later.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you already own hearing aids and aren't sure whether they're Made for iPhone, your audiologist can tell you in a moment, or you can check whether they appear under the hearing section of the iPhone's accessibility settings when you go to pair them.

7. Bluetooth Hearing Aids on Android

ASHA, and the newer LE Audio standard.

Android phones — Samsung, Pixel, and the rest — connect to hearing aids too, though the behind-the-scenes technology has a couple of names worth knowing so you can ask the right questions.

For several years, Android's main way of streaming to hearing aids has been a standard called ASHA, which stands for Audio Streaming for Hearing Aids. Hearing aids built for ASHA pair with most modern Android phones and stream calls and audio directly, much like Made for iPhone does on the Apple side. If you have an Android phone, you want aids

that support ASHA (or the newer standard below).

The newer standard is called Bluetooth LE Audio, and it's gradually rolling out across both phones and hearing aids. It uses less battery and sounds better, and it's the foundation for Auracast, which we'll talk about next. Over the next few years, LE Audio is expected to become the common language that lets any hearing aid talk to any phone — but during the changeover, compatibility still depends on both your specific aids and your specific phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because Android phones come from many makers, pairing can vary a little between a Samsung and a Pixel. If you use Android and wear aids, ask your audiologist which Android phones pair cleanly with your model — they'll usually know, and it saves a lot of trial and error.

8. Auracast — The Change That's Coming

Worth knowing about, even though it's still early.

There's a new technology arriving called Auracast, and while it's still early days, it's worth knowing about because it's going to matter a lot to people who wear hearing aids.

Auracast is a way of broadcasting sound over Bluetooth to an unlimited number of listeners at once. Think of it as the modern, wireless cousin of the loop systems we talked about. In the years ahead, a gate agent at the airport, a speaker at a lecture, or the televisions in a waiting room could broadcast their audio over Auracast, and anyone with Auracast-capable hearing aids could simply tune in — clearly, directly, no holding anything to your ear.

At the moment, Auracast is in its early stage. A growing number of new hearing aid models support it, and more venues are beginning to install it, but it isn't widespread yet, and most people today still rely on telecoil and loop systems for that kind of broadcast listening. If you're buying new aids now and expect to keep them for several years, asking whether they're Auracast-ready is a sensible, forward-looking question — but there's no need to feel you're missing out if your current aids don't have it. Telecoil still does the job in the places that have loops today.

GOOD TO KNOW

Auracast is a good example of why it's worth asking your audiologist about new features at your regular visits. The landscape is changing year to year, and they'll know what's actually available and working, not just what's being advertised.

9. Pairing Your Aids to an iPhone

What you'll see on screen, step by step.

Pairing Made for iPhone hearing aids is a one-time setup, and once it's done, they reconnect on their own every time. Here's what you'll see.

Open Settings, tap Accessibility, and look for a section called Hearing Devices (sometimes under a Hearing heading). With your aids turned on and nearby — opening and closing the battery doors, or taking them in and out of the charger, puts many aids into pairing mode — the iPhone will search and then show your aids' name on the screen. Tap the name. The phone may ask you to confirm a pairing request for each aid, left and right. Accept them, and you're connected.

- 1 Open Settings, then Accessibility, then Hearing Devices.
- 2 Put your aids in pairing mode (often by opening and closing the battery doors or re-seating them in the charger).
- 3 Wait for your aids' name to appear on screen, then tap it.
- 4 Confirm the pairing request for each ear if asked.
- 5 Make a test call to confirm the caller's voice comes through your aids.

Once paired, your aids live in that Hearing Devices screen, and you can also reach their quick controls by pressing the iPhone's side button three times (your audiologist or I can set that shortcut up). If the connection ever drops, it's almost always fixed by turning the aids off and on, or toggling the iPhone's Bluetooth off and back on.

WATCH OUT

Hearing aids pair in the Accessibility, Hearing Devices area — not the regular Bluetooth list where you'd add wireless earbuds. People often look in the wrong place and conclude it isn't working. Start in Accessibility.

10. Pairing Your Aids to an Android Phone

Similar idea, slightly different path by brand.

Pairing on Android follows the same logic — put the aids in pairing mode, let the phone find them, confirm — but the exact menu names vary between a Samsung, a Pixel, and other brands.

On most Android phones you'll find hearing aids under Settings, in a hearing-related part of Accessibility, often labeled Hearing enhancements or Hearing aids. Some phones also let you pair them from the main Connected devices or Bluetooth screen. With your aids in pairing mode and nearby, the phone searches, shows the aids' name, and you tap to connect and confirm each ear.

- 1 Open Settings and look under Accessibility for a Hearing or Hearing aids section (Samsung: Hearing enhancements).
- 2 Put your aids in pairing mode as their instructions describe.
- 3 Tap your aids' name when it appears and confirm the connection.
- 4 If you can't find the hearing section, check Connected devices or Bluetooth as well.
- 5 Make a test call to confirm the sound streams to your aids.

Because the wording moves around between brands and Android versions, don't be discouraged if the menu doesn't match these words exactly — the feature is there, it's just labeled a little differently. If you get stuck, the aid maker's own app (many have one) often has a pairing helper, and that's a fine place to look too.

TIP

Whichever phone you have, pair the aids when you have a few unhurried minutes and the aids are freshly charged. A low battery in an aid is a common reason pairing won't 'take,' and it looks like a phone problem when it isn't.

11. Streaming Calls Straight Into Your Ears

The feature that changes phone calls the most.

Once your aids are paired, the single best thing they do is stream calls directly. When the phone rings and you answer, the caller's voice goes straight into both hearing aids at once — no holding the phone up, no fumbling for the right spot against your ear, no whistle. You can set the phone down on the table and talk hands-free, and because the sound is in both ears, it's often clearer than a phone ever was.

For most people this happens automatically after pairing — answer the call and it's in your aids. On some phones there's a setting to confirm that call audio routes to the hearing aids rather than the phone's speaker; if a call ever comes through the phone instead of your aids, that routing is the thing to check. During a call you can usually tap an audio button on the screen to send the sound to your aids, the phone's speaker, or the earpiece.

Streaming both ears at once has a real benefit beyond convenience. Hearing with both ears helps your brain make sense of speech, so a streamed call where the voice reaches both aids can be noticeably easier to follow than the old way of pressing one ear to the phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you take a lot of calls, streaming will use some of your hearing aids' battery, so you may notice they run down a little faster on heavy days. That's normal. It's a fair trade for calls you can actually hear.

12. Adjusting Your Aids From the Phone

Volume and presets without reaching for your ears.

Many Bluetooth hearing aids, once paired, can be adjusted right from the phone — a genuinely handy thing when you're in a noisy restaurant and don't want to fuss with the tiny controls on the aids themselves.

On an iPhone, the Hearing Devices controls (reachable in Accessibility, or with the triple-press of the side button) let you raise and lower the volume of your aids and often switch between the listening programs your audiologist set up — a quiet-room program, a restaurant program, and so on. On Android, the same kind of control lives in the hearing section, and the hearing aid maker's own app usually offers even more — treble and bass, directional focus, and custom programs.

A word of honesty here: the deeper adjustments — how your aids are tuned, which programs exist, how aggressively they cut noise — are set by your audiologist to match your specific hearing. The phone lets you nudge volume and switch between the programs they created; it doesn't replace the professional fitting. If a particular setting never sounds right no matter how you adjust it on the phone, that's a conversation for your next hearing appointment, not something to keep fiddling with.

TIP

Ask your audiologist to set up two or three clearly-named programs for the situations you're in most — quiet, restaurant, television. Switching between a few good presets from your phone is far easier than hunting through fine adjustments.

13. Live Listen and Sound Amplifier

Turning the phone itself into a microphone.

Here's a feature a lot of people don't know exists and love once they try it. Your phone can become a remote microphone. You set the phone down near whatever you're trying to hear — a soft-spoken friend across the table, a lecturer, the television — and its microphone picks up that sound and sends it into your hearing aids or earbuds.

On an iPhone with Made for iPhone aids, this is called Live Listen. You turn it on, lay the phone near the person or the TV speaker, and their voice comes into your aids amplified and closer. In a noisy restaurant, placing the phone in front of the person you want to hear can lift their voice up out of the clatter. Apple has also been adding the ability to show captions right alongside Live Listen on its newest phones and aids, so you can read along as well.

Android has a close cousin called Sound Amplifier, which does much the same thing — using the phone to boost and clarify the sounds around you, piped into your connected aids or headphones. It also lets you tune how much to boost and how much background noise to tamp down.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is a help in the moment, not a replacement for your hearing aids' own settings. For a regular trouble spot — say you always struggle to hear at the dinner table — mention it to your audiologist. There may be a program on your aids that handles it better than the phone can.

14. Live Captions — Reading the Call

When you'd rather see the words than strain to hear them.

Sometimes the easiest way to get through a call isn't to hear it better — it's to read it. Modern phones can show you a running, written transcript of what the other person is saying, right on the screen, as they speak.

On a newer iPhone, the feature is called Live Captions, and it can caption phone calls, video calls, and other audio, generating the text privately on the phone itself. On Android, the matching feature is Live Caption, which captions audio playing on the phone, including calls on supported models. You turn it on in the accessibility settings, and once it's on, the words scroll by on screen while the person talks.

It isn't perfect. The phone is listening and guessing, so it will occasionally get a word wrong, especially with names, numbers, and heavy accents. Apple and Google both caution that you shouldn't lean on it for anything critical or in an emergency. But for everyday conversation — catching the parts you missed, confirming an address, following along when the line is poor — reading along with the caption can make a hard call easy. Many people use it together with streaming: the voice in their aids and the words on the screen, both at once.

TIP

Turn Live Captions on and try it on a call with someone patient before you need it. Getting used to glancing at the screen while you listen takes a call or two, and it's much nicer to practice with family than to figure it out in the middle of something important.

15. RTT and Texting 911

Reaching emergency help without speaking or hearing.

For people who can't rely on hearing or speaking on a call, phones include a feature called RTT — Real-Time Text. It's a way of communicating during a phone call by typing, where each letter appears on the other person's screen the instant you type it, so a conversation flows almost like talking rather than waiting to send whole messages back and forth.

RTT replaced the old TTY machines that people with hearing loss used for decades, and it's built into modern phones. Importantly, you can use RTT to reach emergency services — you can dial 911 and communicate by typing. Both iPhone and Android support it, and

you turn it on in the phone's accessibility settings under an RTT or TTY heading.

Separately, many areas now support Text-to-911, where you send a text message to 911 in a situation where you can't safely or can't physically speak. Availability depends on your local 911 center, and the long-standing guidance is simple and worth remembering: call if you can, text if you can't. If you ever do need to reach 911 and can't speak, these features exist precisely for that moment.

WATCH OUT

Don't test RTT or text-to-911 by actually contacting 911 — that ties up emergency lines. Just know the features are there and where the setting lives. If you want to be sure text-to-911 works in our area, your local emergency services office can tell you.

16. Flash Alerts, Vibration, and Mono Audio

A few more settings that quietly help every day.

Beyond the big features, a handful of small accessibility settings make a phone friendlier for anyone with hearing loss. You don't need all of them — pick what helps you.

- Flash alerts. The phone can flash its camera light when a call or text comes in, so you see it even if you don't hear it. On iPhone it's in Accessibility under a heading like LED Flash for Alerts; on Android it's usually a Flash notification setting in Accessibility.
- Strong vibration. Turn vibration on for calls and texts so you feel them. Some phones let you pick stronger or custom vibration patterns.
- Mono audio. Normally the phone sends slightly different sound to the left and right. If one ear hears better than the other, mono audio sends the same full sound to both sides so you don't miss anything on your weaker side. It's in Accessibility on both iPhone and Android.
- Left-right balance. On the same screen, you can slide the balance toward your better ear if you prefer.
- Headphone or hearing accommodations. Newer iPhones can fine-tune the sound of calls and media to boost soft sounds and certain frequencies — worth exploring with your audiologist's input.

None of these change your hearing aids; they change how the phone presents sound and alerts. Flash alerts and vibration in particular are small things that prevent a lot of missed calls, and they take only a moment to turn on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Mono audio and balance are especially worth trying if your hearing is noticeably different between your two ears. They cost nothing, change nothing permanently, and can be switched back in seconds if you don't like them.

17. How This Looks Across the Carriers

What's the same everywhere, and what to ask your carrier.

A lot of what we've covered is part of the phone itself, not the carrier, so it works the same whether you're on AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, or one of the smaller budget carriers. The accessibility settings, the Bluetooth pairing, Live Captions, RTT — those live in the phone's software and don't change from carrier to carrier.

Where carriers come in is mostly at the point of sale. Every carrier is required to clearly label the hearing aid ratings on the phones it sells and to offer a selection of hearing-aid-compatible models, so you can always ask any carrier's store or website for their hearing-aid-compatible phones and the M and T ratings. Carriers also offer their own spam-call blocking, which cuts down on the junk calls that are especially maddening when every call is an effort to hear.

- Accessibility settings and Bluetooth pairing are part of the phone, not the carrier — they work the same everywhere.
- Every carrier must label hearing aid ratings and stock compatible phones; ask for their list.
- Text-to-911 depends on your local 911 center, not your carrier's brand.
- Carriers' spam-call filters (AT&T ActiveArmor, T-Mobile Scam Shield, Verizon Call Filter) help cut down hard-to-hear junk calls.
- If you're choosing a carrier, the real question is coverage at your house — a crystal-clear call you can't connect does you no good.

TIP

When you buy, bring your own hearing aids and test an actual call in the store, or confirm the return window. The rating on the box is a guide; a real call with your real aids is the proof.

18. Common Mistakes People Make

The snags I see most, and how to skip them.

Setting up a phone to work with hearing aids goes wrong in a few predictable ways. Knowing them ahead of time saves a lot of frustration.

- Looking for hearing aids in the regular Bluetooth list. On iPhone especially, aids pair under Accessibility, Hearing Devices — not the ordinary Bluetooth screen. People give up because they're looking in the wrong place.
- Buying a phone with only an M rating when you rely on telecoil. If loop systems matter to you, make sure there's a T rating too.
- Trying to pair with a low aid battery. A nearly-dead aid often won't pair, and it looks like the phone's fault. Charge first.
- Expecting the phone to fix a tuning problem. The phone adjusts volume and switches between programs; the fitting itself is your audiologist's job. Endless fiddling won't substitute for a proper adjustment.
- Leaning on Live Captions for critical details. It's a wonderful help, but it guesses, and it can get names and numbers wrong. Confirm anything important.
- Forgetting the simple settings. Flash alerts, vibration, and a loud ringer prevent missed calls and take two minutes to turn on — but they're the first thing people skip.

Almost all of these come down to two things: knowing where the hearing features actually live on the phone, and keeping clear about which problems are the phone's to solve and which belong to your audiologist. Get those two straight and the rest falls into place.

GOOD TO KNOW

If something isn't working and you can't tell whether it's the phone or the aids, that's a perfect thing to have a fresh pair of eyes look at. Often it's a single setting in the wrong spot, fixed in minutes.

19. Questions People Ask

Honest answers to the common ones.

Q: Do I need special hearing aids to use any of this? For the near-the-ear ratings and the phone settings like Live Captions, flash alerts, and mono audio — no, those work with any aids or none. For streaming calls directly into your ears, yes, you need Bluetooth aids (Made for iPhone, or ASHA/LE Audio on Android). Your audiologist can tell you what yours support.

Q: Will Bluetooth streaming drain my hearing aid batteries? It uses some extra power, so on heavy call days you may notice the aids run down a bit faster. For most people it's a fair trade for clearer calls, and it's nothing to worry about.

Q: My aids pair but the call still comes through the phone speaker. What's wrong? Usually it's a routing setting. During the call, look for an audio button on screen and choose your hearing aids. If it keeps happening, the default audio route can be set so calls always go to your aids.

Q: Is telecoil old-fashioned? Should I skip it? Not at all. Telecoil still does something Bluetooth often can't — tune in to loop systems in churches, theaters, and counters. If your aids have it, keep it. Auracast may eventually take over that role, but it's early yet.

Q: Can I use all this on a basic flip phone? Flip phones carry hearing aid ratings too, and many work fine held to the ear or with telecoil, but the Bluetooth streaming and captioning features are generally found on smartphones. If those features matter to you, a smartphone is the way.

Q: Something sounds off no matter what I change on the phone. The phone can only do so much — it adjusts volume and switches programs. If the sound itself isn't right, that's your audiologist's department, and worth a visit.

20. Speaking Instead of Typing

Let the phone do the typing for you.

If typing on a phone's little keyboard is slow going — and for most of us it is — there is a feature that changes everything: you can simply speak, and the phone turns your words into typed text. It works in a text message, an email, a search box, the notes app, nearly anywhere you would otherwise peck at the keys. You talk the way you would to a person, and the words appear on the screen.

The way in is the same on every phone. Wherever the keyboard pops up, look for a small microphone icon — on an iPhone it sits near the space bar at the bottom; on a Samsung, Pixel, or other Android it is usually at the top of the keyboard or on the space bar. Tap it once, wait for the phone to show it is listening, and speak clearly at a normal pace. When you finish, tap the microphone again or just stop talking, and the phone finishes writing. You can even say punctuation out loud — say 'period' or 'question mark' and the phone adds it.

- 1 Open a text message or email so the keyboard appears.
- 2 Tap the small microphone icon (near the space bar on iPhone, top of the keyboard on Android).
- 3 Speak naturally, at an unhurried pace, in a reasonably quiet spot.
- 4 Say 'period,' 'comma,' or 'question mark' where you want punctuation.
- 5 Read it over before sending — speech-to-text occasionally mishears a name or number.

TIP

A quiet room gives the best results. The phone listens hard, so a loud television or a running faucet in the background can muddle what it hears. In a calm spot, speaking a message is often three or four times faster than typing it — and far easier on tired hands and eyes.

21. A Simpler, Big-Button Home Screen

Make the phone show only what you actually use.

A brand-new phone arrives cluttered with dozens of little icons, most of which you will never touch, and that clutter is a big part of why phones feel overwhelming. The fix is to strip the main screen down to a handful of large, clearly-labeled things you actually use — phone, messages, camera, maybe the weather and the grandchildren's photos — and tuck everything else out of the way. The phone is far friendlier when the first screen holds only what matters to you.

On an iPhone, you can press and hold the screen until the icons wiggle, then drag the ones you rarely use onto a later page or into the App Library so the first screen is clean. You can also make the icons and text noticeably larger in the accessibility settings. On a Samsung phone there is a built-in setting called Easy mode that does much of this for you — bigger icons, larger text, and a simpler layout in one switch, found in Settings under Display. Both Apple and Android also let you drop a few big single-tap shortcuts right on the screen that dial a specific person, so calling your daughter is one large tap, not a hunt through a contact list.

- Keep only the apps you truly use on the first screen; move the rest out of sight.
- On Samsung, turn on Easy mode (Settings, Display) for bigger icons and a simpler layout at once.
- On iPhone, press and hold the screen to rearrange, and enlarge icons and text in Accessibility.
- Add a one-tap shortcut that calls a specific family member, so there's no list to search.

- A clean, uncluttered screen is not 'dumbing it down' — it's setting the phone up to serve you.

GOOD TO KNOW

There are also whole senior-friendly launchers you can add to an Android phone that replace the busy home screen with a few giant buttons. They can help a great deal, but they change how the phone looks everywhere, so it's worth trying one with someone who can switch it back if it isn't to your taste.

22. When the Screen Is Hard to See

Magnifier, bigger everything, and the screen reader.

Hearing and seeing often fade together as the years go by, so if the phone's screen has gotten hard to read, the same phone that helps your ears has a whole set of tools for your eyes. None of them cost anything, and all of them switch back off in a moment if they are not to your liking.

Start with the easy, everyday helps. Both iPhone and Android let you make all the text bigger across the whole phone, and make the icons and buttons larger too — on an iPhone it is in Settings under Accessibility, Display and Text Size; on Android it is under Accessibility, in Display size and text. There is also a built-in magnifier: your phone's camera becomes a magnifying glass for reading a pill bottle, a menu, or the fine print on a letter. On an iPhone it is the Magnifier app; on Android it is a Magnification setting. Both let you zoom right in and even freeze the image so you can study it.

For more serious vision loss, the phone can read the screen aloud and let you drive it entirely by touch and sound. Apple's version is called VoiceOver, and Android's is called TalkBack. When it is on, the phone speaks whatever you touch — you slide a finger across the screen, it tells you what is under your finger, and a double-tap activates it. It is a different way of using the phone and takes some real practice to learn, so it is best set up and learned with patient help rather than switched on cold.

WATCH OUT

VoiceOver and TalkBack change how the whole phone responds to your touch — one tap selects, and you double-tap to open. If one gets turned on by accident, the phone can feel broken. It isn't. There's a quick way to turn each back off, and it's a good thing to have written down before you ever experiment with it.

23. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan

A patient hand with the phone side of things.

Getting a phone and a set of hearing aids to work together is exactly the kind of fussy, worth-doing-right job I enjoy helping folks with. I've been doing technology work for more than thirty years, and I've paired a lot of aids, turned on a lot of captions, and found a lot of settings hiding in the wrong menu. I'll handle the phone side patiently and leave your audiologist to the hearing side, where they belong.

My house call is a flat ninety-nine dollars — \$99, however long it takes and however many little settings we sort out while I'm there. It comes with a thirty-day come-back-free guarantee: if something we set up isn't working right, I'll come back within thirty days at no charge. I'd much rather you call me back than sit there straining to hear.

You can reach me at (330) 200-8042. If you call after hours and I can't answer, you won't hit a dead end — you'll reach Sophie, my AI helper who picks up the phone, takes down what you need, and texts it straight to me so I can get back to you. She's friendly and she makes sure your message actually reaches me.

GOOD TO KNOW

If I've helped you hear your phone again and you're glad I did, I'd be grateful for a quick review at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. It helps other folks around the county find me, and it means a lot.

24. Your Notes

The details for your phone and aids, in one place.

Everyone's hearing setup is a little different, so this is the page where we keep the specifics for your phone and your aids. Fill it in and keep it somewhere handy. If I help you set things up, I'll fill this in before I go.

- Phone make and model: _____
- Hearing aid make and model: _____
- Hearing aid rating on the phone (M / T): _____
- Bluetooth type (Made for iPhone / ASHA / LE Audio): _____

- Where the hearing settings live on my phone:

- Programs my audiologist set up (names):

- Features I turned on (Live Captions, flash alerts, mono audio):

- My audiologist's name and number:

- Questions for my next hearing appointment:

- Things to revisit later: _____

Bill Davis — Owner, Bill's Home Tech — Atwater, Ohio. (330) 200-8042 —
bill@billshometech.com. Serving all of Portage County. For anything to do with your
hearing itself, see your audiologist; for the phone side, that's what my number is for.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Two Ways To Connect

Acoustic and telecoil, or Bluetooth



Newer aids add wireless streaming on top of the basics.

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Hearing Aid Ratings

Higher number is better

Rating	Covers	Good
M3 / M4	Microphone mode	Yes
T3 / T4	Telecoil mode	Yes
HAC label	Newer standard	Yes

Both an M and a T rating of 3 or 4 means fully compatible.

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.