BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Hearing-Loss Phone Features — Sound Alerts, Live Captions, Hearing Aid Pairing & Captioned Calls

Make an iPhone or Android phone alert you to doorbells and alarms, caption calls, and connect to hearing aids

Plain-English tech help from:
Bill's Home Tech
Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Both iPhone and Android can help with hearing loss without buying anything. Turn on Sound Recognition (iPhone) or Sound Notifications (Android) so the phone buzzes and flashes for doorbells and alarms, but keep real strobe smoke alarms too. Turn on Live Captions (iPhone) or Live Caption (Android) to read phone calls and videos, and use Live Transcribe for conversations in the room.

Pair Bluetooth hearing aids under Hearing Devices (iPhone) or Connected devices (Android). AirPods Pro 2 and 3 offer a hearing test and hearing aid feature for mild to moderate loss. Free captioned-call services are available to people who register and self-certify their hearing loss.

1 The Short Version

Today's iPhones and Android phones have hearing helpers built right in, and most people never find them. Your phone can buzz and flash when the doorbell rings or the smoke alarm sounds. It can put captions on a phone call or a video. It can connect straight to hearing aids so calls go right into your ears. And there are free captioned-call services for people with hearing loss.

This guide gathers those features in one place, with step-by-step setup for each. Start with the one that solves your biggest daily frustration. You don't need to turn everything on at once.

- Sound alerts: iPhone Sound Recognition and Android Sound Notifications listen for doorbells, alarms, and more.
- Captions: iPhone Live Captions and Android Live Caption and Live Transcribe turn speech into text.
- Hearing aids: most modern Bluetooth hearing aids pair straight to the phone.
- AirPods Pro: on recent models, Apple offers a hearing test and a hearing aid feature for mild to moderate loss.

- Captioned calls: free services, paid for by a federal fund, caption your phone calls.

> **TIP**
> Turn one feature on, then live with it for a few days before adding the next. A phone that suddenly buzzes for every kettle and dog bark can feel overwhelming. Small steps make the helpers feel like help.

2 Which Feature Solves Which Problem?

Hearing loss shows up differently for everyone. Match the feature to the moment that frustrates you most.

The problem	The feature to try	Where
I miss the doorbell or the alarm	Sound Recognition / Sound Notifications	iPhone / Android
Phone calls are hard to follow	Live Captions / Live Caption, or a captioned-call app	iPhone / Android
Conversations at the table are hard	Live Transcribe, or Live Captions on iPhone	Android / iPhone
My hearing aids don't work with my phone	Hearing device pairing	Both
I don't have hearing aids yet	AirPods Pro hearing test and hearing aid feature	iPhone with AirPods Pro 2 or 3

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> These features are helpers, not a substitute for a hearing exam. If your hearing has changed, an audiologist or your doctor can check for causes that are easy to treat, like earwax. They can also tell you which kind of hearing help fits your loss.

3 iPhone: Sound Recognition, Step by Step

Sound Recognition lets your iPhone listen for certain sounds and send you a notification, with a buzz and an on-screen alert, when it hears one. In recent versions of iOS it lives under a setting called Sound & Name Recognition.

1. Open Settings and tap Accessibility.
2. Tap Sound & Name Recognition. On older iPhones this may just say Sound Recognition.
3. Turn on Sound Recognition, then tap Sounds.
4. Turn on the sounds you care about, such as Smoke, Fire, Siren, Door Bell, Door Knock, or Baby Crying.
5. The first time, your iPhone may download a small file for each sound. Let it finish over Wi-Fi.
6. Ask someone to ring the doorbell to test it.

TIP

Make the alert hard to miss: in Settings, go to Accessibility, then Audio & Visual, and turn on LED Flash for Alerts. The camera flash will blink with each alert, which is easy to see across a room.

GOOD TO KNOW

Recent iOS versions also add Name Recognition, which can alert you when the iPhone hears your name. It's handy in a busy kitchen or a waiting room.

4 iPhone: Teaching It Your Own Doorbell or Appliance

Not every doorbell or washing machine sounds the same. If the built-in Door Bell setting misses yours, you can teach your iPhone the exact sound.

1. Go to Settings, then Accessibility, then Sound & Name Recognition, then Sounds.

2. Tap Custom Alarm (for an alarm-type sound) or Custom Appliance or Doorbell.
3. Type a name, such as Front Doorbell, and follow the prompts.
4. Hold the iPhone near the sound in a quiet room, and play the sound when asked. It will ask several times.
5. Save it, then test it from another room.

WATCH OUT

Apple says not to rely on Sound Recognition in emergencies or where you could be harmed. It's a helpful extra, not a smoke alarm. Every home with hearing loss should also have smoke and CO alarms with a strobe light or a bed shaker. My guide "Hearing (and Seeing) the Doorbell from Any Room" covers alerting devices: billshometech.com/guides/hearing-the-doorbell-from-any-room.

5 Android: Sound Notifications, Step by Step

On Android, Google's Live Transcribe & Sound Notifications app does the same job. It's built into many phones, including Pixel and many Samsung models, and is free from the Google Play Store if it's missing. Sound Notifications needs Android 12 or newer.

1. Open Settings and tap Accessibility.
2. Look for Sound Notifications. On some phones it's inside a section such as Hearing or Hearing enhancements.
3. If you can't find it, install Live Transcribe & Notification from the Google Play Store, then look again.
4. Turn on Sound Notifications and allow microphone and notification permissions when asked.
5. Open its settings and pick the sounds you want, such as smoke alarm, doorbell, baby crying, or water running.
6. Turn on the shortcut if offered, so you can switch it on from Quick Settings.

TIP

Sound Notifications can also flash the camera light and vibrate. Look in its settings for flash and vibration options, and turn on the ones you'll notice.

GOOD TO KNOW

Menu names vary between Pixel, Samsung, Motorola, and other brands. If your phone's menus don't match these steps exactly, use the search bar at the top of Settings and type Sound Notifications.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

6 Captions on Your iPhone: Live Captions

Live Captions turns speech your iPhone plays into text on the screen, almost as it's spoken. It works on phone calls, FaceTime, videos, and most apps. It runs on the phone itself, and the captions are generated automatically, so expect an occasional wrong word.

1. Open Settings and tap Accessibility.
2. Tap Live Captions and turn it on.
3. A small captions box appears on the screen. Drag it where you like, and tap it to make it bigger or pause it.
4. Make a phone call or play a video, and watch the words appear.
5. To change the text size or color, look under Appearance in the Live Captions settings.

WATCH OUT

Live Captions works in English and is supported on newer iPhones. Older models may not show the option, and it isn't available in every country. If you don't see it, your iPhone may be too old, or it may need a software update.

TIP

FaceTime has its own captions switch. In Settings, open the FaceTime settings and turn on Live Captions so they appear during video calls.

7 Captions on Your Android Phone: Live Caption

Live Caption puts captions on almost anything your Android phone plays, including videos, podcasts, and on Pixel and other supported phones, phone calls. On Pixel 6 and newer, you can even type a reply during a call and have the phone speak it aloud for you.

1. Open Settings and tap Accessibility, then Live Caption.
2. Turn on Live Caption, or Use Live Caption.
3. To caption calls, look for a calls option in the same screen and turn it on.
4. On Pixel 6 or newer, turn on Type responses during calls if you'd like to type instead of speak.
5. Press a volume button during a video or call and tap the captions icon to switch it on or off quickly.

GOOD TO KNOW

Google notes that Live Caption isn't meant for calls with more than one other person, uses extra battery, and turns off in battery saver mode. If captions disappear, check whether battery saver is on.

8 Conversations at the Table: Live Transcribe

Live Transcribe is different from Live Caption. Instead of captioning what the phone plays, it listens to the room through the microphone and writes what people around you are saying. Set the phone on the table at dinner or the doctor's office, and read along.

1. Open the Live Transcribe & Notification app, or go to Settings, then Accessibility, then Live Transcribe.
2. Allow microphone access when asked.
3. Set the phone on the table, screen facing you, and let people talk normally.
4. Tap the settings gear to make the text bigger or switch to a dark background.
5. To save a conversation for later, look for a save-transcriptions setting and turn it on.

TIP

On iPhone, Live Captions can do something similar. With Live Captions turned on, tap the microphone button in the captions box to caption the people talking in the room.

WATCH OUT

Before you save or share a transcript of a private conversation, ask the people in it. Some folks don't like being recorded, even as text.

9 Pairing Hearing Aids with an iPhone

Most modern Bluetooth hearing aids work with iPhone. Many are Made for iPhone (MFi), which means calls, music, and video audio can stream straight into your ears. Some newer hearing aids pair the regular Bluetooth way instead. Your hearing aid's paperwork or app will say which kind you have.

1. Update your iPhone: Settings, General, Software Update.
2. Put your hearing aids in pairing mode. For many, that means turning them off and on, or opening and closing the battery door.
3. On the iPhone, open Settings, then Accessibility, then Hearing Devices.
4. Tap Pair MFi Hearing Device, or tap your hearing aids' name when it appears.
5. Tap Pair when asked. You may be asked once for each ear.
6. Make a test call to check the sound goes to your hearing aids.

TIP

Once paired, you can triple-click the side button (or the Home button on older iPhones) to open a quick hearing-device control for volume and programs. Set it up under Settings, Accessibility, then Accessibility Shortcut.

GOOD TO KNOW

My guide "Hearing Aids and Your Phone — Bluetooth, MFi, and Streaming Without Frustration" goes deeper on streaming and common snags: billshometech.com/guides/hearing-aids-bluetooth.

10 Pairing Hearing Aids with an Android Phone

Android phones connect to hearing aids in a few ways. Many hearing aids use ASHA, Google's hearing aid standard. Newer ones use Bluetooth LE Audio, which also opens the door to Auracast, public broadcast audio in places like theaters and airports. Some pair as ordinary Bluetooth devices.

1. Put your hearing aids in pairing mode.
2. On the phone, open Settings, then Connected devices, then Pair new device. Google suggests trying this path first because it works with all types of hearing devices.
3. If they don't appear, try Settings, then Accessibility, then Hearing devices, then Pair new device, which works best with ASHA hearing aids.
4. Tap your hearing aids' name and confirm the pairing for each ear.
5. Make a test call and play a short video to check the sound.

WATCH OUT

Not every Android phone supports every hearing aid streaming type, especially older or budget models. Before you buy new hearing aids or a new phone, ask the hearing aid provider for their compatibility list.

TIP

Many hearing aid makers have their own app for volume, programs, and settings. Install it from the Play Store after pairing. Your audiologist can tell you which one.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

11 AirPods Pro as Hearing Help

Apple's AirPods Pro 2 and AirPods Pro 3, with up-to-date software and an iPhone on iOS 18 or later, include a Hearing Test and a Hearing Aid feature. The feature is meant for adults 18 and older with perceived mild to moderate hearing loss. It's not a replacement for prescription hearing aids when loss is more severe.

1. Put the AirPods Pro in your ears, connected to your iPhone.
2. Open Settings, tap your AirPods' name near the top, and look for the hearing health section.
3. Take the Hearing Test in a quiet room. It takes about five minutes.
4. If the results show mild to moderate loss, follow the prompts to set up the Hearing Aid feature.
5. Use the hearing controls in Control Center to adjust amplification and balance.

GOOD TO KNOW

My guide "AirPods Pro as Hearing Aids — The Hearing Aid Feature, Step by Step" covers this in full, including daily use and cleaning: billshometech.com/guides/airpods-hearing-aid-feature.

WATCH OUT

If the hearing test shows more than mild to moderate loss, or your hearing changed suddenly, see an audiologist or your doctor. Sudden hearing loss needs prompt medical attention.

12 Captioned Phone Calls: Free Services

If phone calls are the biggest struggle, a captioned-call service may help more than any setting. You talk and listen as usual, and the other person's words appear as text on a screen. Behind the scenes, the captions are created by voice-recognition technology and, with some providers, trained staff.

- This service is called IP CTS, Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service, and is overseen by the FCC.
- It's paid for by a federal relay fund, so there's no charge to the person using it once they register.
- You must register and self-certify that you have a hearing loss that makes captions necessary.
- Providers offer smartphone apps, and some offer a captioned home phone. CaptionCall and ClearCaptions are two FCC-certified providers.

WATCH OUT

Because the service is federally funded, it's only for people who need it because of hearing loss. Signing up someone who doesn't need it isn't allowed. Be wary of anyone who asks you to pay for the captions themselves.

TIP

Comparing captioned home phones and providers? My guide "Captioned Home Phones Compared — CapTel vs. CaptionCall vs. Clarity" covers the options: billshometech.com/guides/captioned-home-phones-captel-vs-captioncall-vs-clarity.

13 A Few More Settings Worth a Look

Once the big features are on, these small settings round things out.

- Flash for alerts: iPhone (Accessibility, Audio & Visual, LED Flash for Alerts); Android (Accessibility or Notifications, Flash notifications).
- Mono audio and balance: helps if one ear hears better than the other.
- Headphone Accommodations on iPhone: tunes the sound of AirPods and many Beats headphones to your hearing.
- Vibration patterns: give important contacts their own buzz pattern.
- Text instead of call: ask family to text or send video messages with captions when they can.

GOOD TO KNOW

For more on all of these, my guides "iPhone Hearing Helpers" (billshometech.com/guides/iphone-hearing) and "Android Hearing Helpers" (billshometech.com/guides/android-hearing) walk through every setting.

14 Helping a Parent Set This Up

Many people reading this are setting up a phone for a mom, dad, or spouse. A few tips make it go more smoothly.

1. Sit beside them, not across, so you're both looking at the same screen.
2. Turn on one feature, show them what it looks like, and let them try it.
3. Test the doorbell and smoke alerts with them so they recognize the alerts.
4. Write the steps you did on a card, in large print, and leave it by their phone.
5. Check back in a week to see what's helpful and what's annoying, and adjust.

TIP

If they also watch a lot of TV, my guide "Make Captions Appear on Live TV" (billshometech.com/guides/make-captions-appear-live-tv) covers captions on the big screen.

15 When to Call Bill

These features are powerful, but the menus move around between phone models and software updates, and hearing aids add another layer. If you'd like someone to set it all up and show you how it works, that's what Bill does, with 30+ years of professional experience and plenty of patience.

- You want sound alerts and captions set up and tested on your phone or a parent's.
- Your hearing aids won't pair, keep disconnecting, or calls don't come through them.
- You're choosing a new phone and want one that works well with your hearing aids.
- You'd like help registering for a captioned-call app.
- You want flash alerts, vibration patterns, and the rest fine-tuned.

Bill's help is $49 for a remote session or $99 for an in-home visit. Call (330) 200-8042. Bill can't diagnose hearing loss. That's for your audiologist or doctor. He can make sure the technology works for you.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the phone. One feature at a time, and test each one with someone.

I want to…	Do this…
Know when the doorbell rings (iPhone)	Settings › Accessibility › Sound & Name Recognition › Sounds
Know when the doorbell rings (Android)	Settings › Accessibility › Sound Notifications
Caption phone calls	iPhone: Accessibility › Live Captions; Android: Accessibility › Live Caption
Read what people at the table say	Android: Live Transcribe; iPhone: microphone button in Live Captions
Pair hearing aids	iPhone: Accessibility › Hearing Devices; Android: Connected devices › Pair new device
Get captioned calls	Register with an FCC-certified captioned-call (IP CTS) provider
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

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

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

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.

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