

# Home telephones

You'll find this factsheet useful if you have hearing loss and want to know what can help you use the telephone at home. It covers accessories you can buy for use with standard phones, phones designed for people with hearing loss, and what to consider when choosing a new phone.

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**Note:** This factsheet covers home telephones only. For information on choosing a mobile or smartphone that's suitable for people with hearing loss, see our factsheet *Using mobiles and smartphones when you have hearing loss*.

**i** If you'd like this factsheet in Braille, large print or audio, please contact our Information Line - see last page for contact details.



# How can I adjust or adapt my existing phone to help with my hearing loss?

## Help to hear the phone ring

If you find it difficult to hear your home phone ring:

- check to see if you can increase the ringer volume
- check to see if you can change the melody or ringtone
- try placing your phone on a hard surface – this may make the ring louder.

If you still can't hear your phone ring, the following products may help:

- **Extension bells or ringers** – You can buy extension bells that let you hear your phone ringing when you're not near to it; for example, if you're in another room. There are also extension ringers that may come with a range of features, including volume control and different ringtones.
- **Visual call indicators** – These have a flashing light and most also have a loud ringer. Some are powered from the telephone line, so they don't need batteries or mains power. Others are mains or battery powered (or can be powered from both). They can be placed on a surface or mounted on a wall.

- **A multi-alerting system** – This can alert you to different sounds in your home such as the telephone, a crying baby, the doorbell or smoke alarm. Most systems use flashing lights, vibrating pagers or loud ringers to attract your attention – or a combination of all three.

 To find out more, see our factsheet *Alerting devices*.

## Help to hear on the phone

If you have a regular home phone and find it hard to hear during phone calls:

- check to see if you can turn up the handset volume or adjust the tone of the sound you hear ([see page 4](#))
- if you use hearing aids, check to see if your phone is hearing aid compatible – you'll need to switch your hearing aid(s) to the hearing loop (or 'T') setting (we tell you more about this on [page 3](#)).

If you still struggle to hear speech over the phone, you may need to consider either:

- using a telephone amplifier with your existing phone
- replacing your existing phone with a phone designed specifically for people with hearing loss – such as a hearing aid compatible phone or an amplified telephone. We explain what these are in the next section.

## What are hearing aid compatible phones?

A hearing aid compatible phone sends the other person's voice directly into your hearing aids during a call. For this to work, your hearing aids need to be on the hearing loop setting (formerly known as the 'T' setting). Your audiologist may need to activate this setting before you can use it – ask them if you're unsure.

A small coil of wire (called a Telecoil) sits inside the earpiece of the phone – this produces a magnetic field that picks up the sound and transfers it directly to your hearing aids (when on the loop setting). Only the sound from your phone handset is amplified by your hearing aids, allowing you to focus on what the person is saying and hear it more clearly.

For a hearing aid compatible phone to work, you still need to place the handset earpiece next to your hearing aid. If the handset earpiece is too far away from your hearing aid (more than 2–3cm), the magnetic signal picked up by your hearing aid will be too weak and you'll find it difficult to hear speech.

Many standard telephones are hearing aid compatible, from inexpensive ones with basic features (from around £15) to more expensive phones with more features.

There are also cordless phones that are hearing aid compatible, but some of these may cause interference (a buzzing or ringing sound) when used with some hearing aids.

Some hearing aid compatible phones may work better for you than others, so, if you can, try them out in the shop.

 To find out more about hearing loops, see our factsheet *Assistive listening devices*.

## What are amplified telephones?

Amplified telephones are corded and cordless telephones that are designed especially for people with mild, moderate or even severe hearing loss (depending on how much amplification they provide). Most amplified telephones are hearing aid compatible (see opposite) and have an extra-loud ringer.

### Handset amplification

The phone will have a handset volume control that you can use to help you hear better during calls. Most also have a separate handset 'volume boost' or 'amplify' button, which will make people's voices even louder.

The amount of handset amplification varies from phone to phone, but typically it can be between 20 and 40 decibels (dB) or more. A 20dB increase will sound four times as loud, whereas a 40dB increase will sound 16 times as loud. Some phones can amplify a person's voice by as much as 50 or 60dB.

**Note:** Because amplified phones produce high volume levels, care should be taken when using them, particularly if they are also used by people who don't have hearing loss. Always start at a low volume and gradually increase to a comfortable volume level.

Some corded phones also let you amplify your own voice, which may be useful if your voice is quiet or weak, or if the person you're speaking to has some hearing loss.

## Extra-loud ringer

Amplified phones have a loud ringer and most allow you to adjust its volume. Most amplified telephones also allow you to select different ringtones; you may find you can hear some ringtones more easily than others. If you are buying the phone in a shop, try, if possible, to check that the ringer is loud enough for you, and remember that you may not always be near the phone when it rings.

## What useful features should I look out for when buying a phone?

You may find some of the following features useful:

### Handset tone adjustment

Some phones allow you to boost or reduce certain speech tones, which may make people's voices sound clearer. For example, age-related hearing loss makes high-pitched sounds harder to hear, so boosting these tones may help.

## Speakerphone

A speakerphone allows you to listen and chat without needing to hold the telephone handset to your ear. Instead, you hear the person you're speaking to through a built-in speaker.

A button on the phone allows you to switch easily between the handset and speakerphone. You can adjust the volume level of the speakerphone. A speakerphone is also useful if more than one person needs to listen in to the call.

## Large dial buttons

If you can't hold or press things easily, or have poor eyesight, try a big-button phone. The large dial buttons and large, clear labels on these phones make them easier to use. Most big-button phones are corded, but there are cordless ones too.

## Headset socket

Some phones have a socket for a telephone headset. This lets you use your hands for other tasks, such as typing, which is why headsets are often used in offices. Some headsets are hearing aid compatible and will work with hearing aids on the hearing loop setting ([see page 3](#)).

Most headset phones have volume controls to adjust the sound level from the headset. You can also plug in a telephone amplifier between the telephone and headset to make the sound louder. You'll need to check for compatibility, as not all headsets use the same connections.

## Answering machine

Many home phones have an answering machine. Most allow you to listen to the message through the handset or loudspeaker, and most of them have a pre-recorded outgoing message or greeting. You can change this and record your own greeting. Remote access lets you listen to your messages when you're away from home.

## Two handsets

These are useful if you lipread and a lipspeaker is available to relay a conversation to you.

## Photo dial buttons (corded phones only)

These are larger-than-normal, one-touch dial buttons to which photos of relatives and friends can be added. They are designed to make the phone easier to use for those with memory loss or dementia, and can be pre-programmed with the telephone number of the person shown in the photo.

## Assistance button

This is a special button (normally in red) that can be pre-programmed with the phone numbers of friends or relatives. If you require assistance, you can press the button and the phone dials the pre-stored numbers. If the call is not answered within a certain time, the phone will dial the next number on the list.

## Vibration

A vibrating phone or 'bone phone' is designed for people with conductive hearing loss. Conductive hearing loss develops when a problem or blockage in the middle ear prevents sound waves from reaching the cochlea (the hearing organ) in the inner ear.

A vibrating phone is similar to a standard corded telephone but with a vibrating earpiece, which you hold against the bone behind your ear. Speech vibrations (sound waves) travel through the bone to the cochlea in the inner ear, enabling you to hear speech over the phone. Members of your household who don't have hearing loss can also use the handset.

### Have you heard about the Next Generation Text service?

The Next Generation Text (NGT) service is a free, text-to-voice and voice-to-text relay service run by BT. It has replaced the old BT Text Relay service, which could only be used with a textphone. NGTS, on the other hand, can be used on smartphones, tablets and computers - as well as with a textphone.

As with the old Text Relay service, NGTS continues to use relay assistants (previously called 'text relay assistants' or 'operators') to speak or type words, as required, so that both people involved in the telephone call know what the other is saying.



Find out more in our factsheet *Text relay services* or at [ngts.org.uk](http://ngts.org.uk)

## Where can I find out more about products to help with hearing loss?

The other factsheets in our **Products and technology** range are:

- *Understanding wireless technology for hearing aids*
- *Communicating online*
- *Enjoying TV*
- *Assistive listening devices*
- *Alerting devices*
- *Text relay services*
- *Using mobiles and smartphones when you have hearing loss*
- *Smoke alarms.*

You can order these factsheets from our Information Line ([see last page](#) for contact details) or download them from our website at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets)

You can also find lots of useful information on our website at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/products-and-equipment](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/products-and-equipment)

### Join our online forum

There are increasing numbers of products designed for people with hearing loss. What products couldn't you live without?

Join the debate in our **Products and Equipment forum**: [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/forums/products-and-equipment.aspx?g=topics&f=3](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/forums/products-and-equipment.aspx?g=topics&f=3)

## Products to help with hearing loss

The Action on Hearing Loss online shop features the latest products and technology to help with hearing loss and tinnitus, including home telephones, and our experienced Customer Services team is here to support you to choose the product that's right for you. All proceeds from product sales go back into supporting Action on Hearing Loss.

Shop online at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop)

To order your free catalogue, or to find out which products could help you, look online or contact our Customer Services team:

Telephone: **03330 144 525**

Textphone: **03330 144 530**

Email: [solutions@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:solutions@hearingloss.org.uk)



### Information you can trust

The Information Standard certifies us as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. Our **Product Technologist, Kevin Taylor**, reviewed and updated this factsheet, published September 2017.

### Did you find this factsheet helpful?

We'd love to know what you think of this factsheet - please email us at [reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk)

If you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create new publications and improve existing ones, please let us know.

## Further information from Action on Hearing Loss

Our expert information covers everything you need to know about:

- hearing loss and deafness
- tinnitus
- ear problems and treatments
- hearing aids and cochlear implants
- useful products and technology
- communication tactics and support
- benefits and grants
- your rights.

Visit our website [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk) or call our Information Line ([see last page](#)) for information, support and publications. You can also find out about services in your area, our hearing research, and how you can get involved.

## Please help us support others

We provide our leaflets, factsheets and Information Line service free of charge to anyone affected by deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss in the UK. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to help us do this. We would be very grateful if you would consider making a donation – of as little or as much as you can afford.

Please send a cheque, payable to Action on Hearing Loss, to:

**Freepost RTLX-CZKX-BTTZ**  
**Action on Hearing Loss**  
**1-3 Highbury Station Road**  
**London N1 1SE**

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Donate online at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/donate](https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/donate)

Or make a donation over the phone by credit or debit card:

 **0203 227 6182**

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Thank you.

Our purpose is to help people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. We enable them to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

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### **Action on Hearing Loss Information Line**

Telephone **0808 808 0123**  
Textphone **0808 808 9000**  
SMS **0780 000 0360**  
(standard text message rates apply)  
Email **[information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)**

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