

**Solita Griffis**

**From:** Pam Gregory  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 12, 2010 10:50 AM  
**To:** Mikelle Morra; Solita Griffis  
**Subject:** FW: Cell phone and hearing aid compatibility

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**From:** jonathanbrown20@aol.com [mailto:jonathanbrown20@aol.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 12, 2010 9:41 AM  
**To:** Pam Gregory  
**Cc:** abpagould@aol.com; menadig@yahoo.com; rackncue@sbcglobal.net  
**Subject:** Cell phone and hearing aid compatibility

Hi Pam,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer my opinion on cell phones for the hard of hearing. Stacie Mawson, from Hartford, forwarded me your request.

Here is my situation: I have a medium hearing loss. I previously owned a cell phone, in fact, I owned more than one from AT&T and then from Verizon. I live in the suburbs of SW Connecticut where there are "no service" spots due to the hills. I worked for GTE Verizon for many years and was involved with the early market research on the product. I don't own or use a cell phone now. The reason for this is that I felt it was a hassle to use and contracts were unnecessarily complex and onerous.

Being on a fixed and limited income budget and retired, if I were to use one, I would use it for road emergencies, disaster backup when I lose electricity in my house, which happens about 6 times a year for a few hours. My use would include Internet access + cell network access -- not just voice calls.

I understand there is no perfect phone for every person with hearing loss. It is a matter of trial and error. Hopefully, the vendor will make lots of product information simple and clear. In addition, the vendor will let me test the phone before purchase. When I went looking for a cell phone a few years ago, I found the choices overwhelming and the terminology baffling. And I had worked in the industry for years, but thought about all the folks who hadn't.

Here are some questions I tried to answer before I gave up looking:

**What do the M and T ratings mean to my hearing situation? If I am parked by the highway, can I hear on the cell phone when trucks rush by? Do I need a "4" level?**

Can I hear in a noisy environment like a restaurant with an M3/T3 rating, for example -- with or without my hearing aid telecoils?

As you know, the higher the rating, the more likely the cell phone will be compatible with my

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hearing aid, but the price could bring me over the threshold of what I can afford.

I understand an M4/T4 rating is available only for cell phones using CDMA technology and carried by Sprint and Verizon. However, the Verizon cell tower is behind a hill near my house making the signal sometimes weak. Even though Verizon offers a desirable feature, it may not work for me.

## **2-What is my hearing aid's Radio Frequency (RF) immunity level to the interference caused by cell phones?**

My hearing aid dispenser only carries a couple of brands/manufactures of hearing aids, as most others do. Although my dispenser may be able to provide me this immunity level for my Phonak hearing aids, how important is this rating to me in selecting a hearing aid? If the level rating is poor, should I go to another dispenser? I don't think so.

Furthermore, ratings for my hearing aid's telecoil immunity to interference are not offered. Since it is likely that I would be using my telecoils while on the cell phone, this rating is not useful unless the FCC mandated the ratings be made available. For now, this rating does not provide much insight.

## **3-What type of hearing aid do I have, or should I get?**

I use two in-the-ear canal (ITE) hearing aids, one in each ear. I am told it may provide less interference than Behind-The-Ear (BTE) hearing aids. ITE hearing aids have a greater distance between the microphone on the hearing aid and the antenna on the cell phone that can create unnecessary interference for the user. Switching hearing aids and styles (i.e., from ITE to BTE open fit equipped with Bluetooth) may require me to switch cell phones/services in order to hear in the very same noisy environment.

I wear glasses. Repositioning the cell phone over the ear or hearing aid can also help, but it is a hassle with my glasses on. Further, if I had open-fit hearing aids, the problem would be worse. So, I would consider using Bluetooth connections between the cell phone and my hearing aids. This would require buying new hearing aids with a Bluetooth boot for \$2000 each.

## **4-What type of cell phone coverage do I need?**

I need to determine whether I need domestic or international coverage. My son lives in London, so I am a candidate for a phone that works there.

Certain transmission technologies work in the US, others work internationally. Cell phones in the CDMA transmission technology are rated either M3 or M4, but the cell phones in the GSM transmission technology are only rated an M3. Weighing GSM coverage versus an M4 rating is a personal decision.

## **5- What is the cell phone rated and what does that mean to my hearing?**

Every cell phone store should provide documentation for cell phones rated as hearing aid compatible. However, as a practical matter, I don't know what this means. It is like saying a product is "organic" or has "higher quality." The information should be on the placard by the cell phones and on the box. Sometimes the information on the placard is really so tiny, it is impossible to read. A ten-point or larger font on product labels should be mandatory.

### **6- Can I do an in-store cell phone test?**

No Contract booths operate differently from Carrier stores. Only Carrier stores are required to allow consumers to test the phones rated as hearing aid compatible prior to purchase. For me, I want to test a No Contract phone in a noisy as well as a quiet setting. I want to make sure there is room to adjust the volume control of the phone when testing the phone in a noisy setting. I can't do this in all cases.

### **7- Am I able to test the cell phone at home?**

Every vendor has a different return policy. I really don't want to read it at the point of sale holding up the salesperson. I simply want to ask if there are any early termination fees if I take it home and try it for a week.

### **8- Is there too much magnetic noise in the background when the volume is adjusted?**

The backlight typically turns on every time the volume control is adjusted. Manufacturers are not required to test the interference potential of the backlighting on the phone, but it can create interference for consumers who use their telecoil for listening. Telecoil users should assess whether they can hear interference when the backlight is lit when trying a phone.

### **SUMMARY:**

Perhaps you can see from the eight issues I outlined above why I do not own a cell phone. If I could see my way through these issues and find a low-cost No Contract arrangement, perhaps I would change my mind. I know that this technology is constantly changing. Android is coming on like gang-busters. So, I will keep this in mind when selecting a contract length. And, I will coordinate my cell phone looking at the time I need new hearing aids. A carrier may not allow early termination of a contract if one's hearing loss changes.

In the meanwhile, perhaps the FCC can help simplify the buying decision for this senior citizen who is hard of hearing. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Jonathan Brown  
Vice President, HLAA SW CT Chapter