

## Patient information

# Assistive listening devices (ALDs)

Assistive listening devices or ALDs are pieces of equipment, other than hearing aids, that can be used to help the hearing impaired. Even when hearing aid(s) are set up as best as possible, people with a hearing impairment are still likely to have difficulties in some listening situations. In some cases there may be ALDs that could potentially provide further help.

ALDs are available for various circumstances, including:

- General listening
- Television or radio
- Telephone - landline or mobile
- Theatre, cinema, or other events
- Talks, lectures and meetings
- Alerting devices, for example a doorbell, telephone ringing, smoke alarm, baby monitor, or alarm clock

ALDs are sometimes designed to be used in conjunction with a hearing aid(s), or sometimes to be used on their own. Devices use different methods to try to help, such as:

- Amplified signals or sound
- Reducing the distance between the sound source and the listener
- Reducing the impact of noise on the listening situation
- Using vibration to alert the individual

Different types of signal might be used to transmit the sound to the listener, such as infrared, induction loop, FM or Bluetooth systems, as well as vibration. ALDs can provide the specific listener with a boost to amplification or a modified alerting signal, without disturbing others close by.

# **Guide to types of ALDs**

## **Personal amplifier / listening device**

These usually consist of a small box with a microphone, which are often best used in one to one conversations, and help to reduce background noise. They can be used in meetings, lectures, in the car, or many other possible situations. The microphone may be left on the box with the whole device pointed at the speaker, or the microphone can be on a short cord that the speaker holds or attaches to their clothing. These are usually relatively inexpensive devices but are often not wireless, so not suitable for hearing over long distances or where the listener or sound source needs to move around a lot. Some wireless devices are available, but will be more expensive.

## **Infrared**

These devices transmit sounds using light waves. They are often used for television or in the theatre. The signal is blocked by walls so this type of signal is good for privacy, for example in a medical appointment. As the signal can be blocked by any object or person between the device and the listener, this can be a nuisance in other situations. The signal may also be affected by sunlight.

## **Induction Loop**

Induction loops or loop systems use an electromagnetic field to transmit sound wirelessly between speaker and listener, often in conjunction with the 'telecoil' or 'T' programme on a hearing aid(s). The loop consists of an insulated wire that ranges from a small loop worn around the neck to a loop that goes around the entire room, or even a large area in a theatre, cinema, place of worship, or other auditorium. It can be used via headphones or a receiver system, without using a hearing aid. Sound is transferred directly into the headphones / receiver system or hearing aid to reduce the impact of background noise and effectively reduce the distance between the sound source and listener in terms of sound, if not physically. They may be fitted in other public buildings or areas such as meeting rooms, lecture theatres, shops, or at the counter in the bank.

Some, but not all, telephones contain an induction loop. Your hearing aid will usually need to be switched on to the loop programme to use the loop system, although sometimes your hearing aid can be set up to detect the loop in a telephone and switch to the 'telecoil' programme automatically. The loop, 'telecoil' or 'T' programme usually needs to be added to your hearing aid settings by your audiologist.

## **FM**

These are wireless systems that use radio waves and are often used in classrooms but also outdoors or for general listening situations. The listener wears a portable receiver device and the speaker wears a microphone transmitter. They can work over fairly large distances. These systems can be relatively expensive.

## **Bluetooth**

This enables the listener to connect their hearing aid wirelessly via a 'streamer' device to something like a mobile phone, computer, or tablet, for example. It provides a secure, low interference connection, but only over a relatively limited distance. A 'streamer' is a device, often worn around the neck, which allows the user to link hearing devices wirelessly to a wide range of Bluetooth enabled sound sources. The user is able to switch between multiple devices using a single 'streamer'. Most hearing aid manufacturers produce their own streamer device.

## **Help for particular activities**

### **Telephones**

It can be helpful to adapt the position you hold your telephone, for use with a hearing aid, to achieve improved volume and sound quality. Hold the telephone receiver handset higher up to aim for the microphones on your hearing aid, which should be sitting just above the top of your ear. You may need to hold the receiver at an angle or with a small gap from your hearing aid to prevent whistling. Phone someone you know well and tell them you are practising your telephone technique so that you can move the handset around to find the best position for you, without the pressure of practising during a normal phone call. If you require further help then telephones for the hearing impaired are available with a volume control, an amplifier button, a speakerphone, and/or an induction loop. For those who are unable to hear on the telephone it is possible to use a textphone. Details of the next generation text service are available at [www.ngts.org.uk/](http://www.ngts.org.uk/). This service uses a relay assistant who can speak your typed words to the person you wish to communicate with and then type their response back to you for you to read.

### **Mobile phones**

Again it can be best to adapt the position that the telephone is held to hear best via a hearing aid. There are also accessories which can be used to wirelessly connect your hearing aid to your telephone. If you are not able to hear on the phone then you can use text messages to communicate. You can use texting to contact the emergency services but will need to register your phone first by sending a text saying "Register" to "999", and then following the instructions.

## Alerting devices

Devices to alert the hearing impaired to the doorbell, telephone ringing, baby alarm, smoke alarm, or to someone you care for needing assistance, are available using louder alerting sounds, flashing lights, or vibration. The devices are often portable so that you can move them around with you for easier alerting. Pager systems are available to alert you to several different warnings.

## Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms or detectors are available with flashing lights or a vibrating pad that goes under your pillow. You may be eligible for a Safer Home Visit from your Fire and Rescue prevention practitioner or your local fire-fighters, where they will be able to provide and install a free smoke alarm where necessary. To check whether you are eligible or to refer yourself for a visit then contact your local fire service. Some contact details are provided below:

### Nationally

Website: [www.fireservice.co.uk](http://www.fireservice.co.uk)

### Suffolk

Suffolk County Council website, Fire and Rescue Service section, to check eligibility and make a referral for a Safer Home Visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-safety-in-the-home/check-if-youre-eligible-for-a-safer-home-visit/>

Telephone: 01473 260588

Email: [fire.businesssupport@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:fire.businesssupport@suffolk.gov.uk)

### Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service website, with online referral form for Home Fire Safety check: [www.cambsfire.gov.uk/home-fire-safety-checks-508.aspx](http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/home-fire-safety-checks-508.aspx)

Telephone: 0800 917 9994

### Norfolk

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service website, with online form to check eligibility for a Home Fire Risk Check: <http://www.norfolkfireservice.gov.uk/nfrs/your-safety/safety-in-your-home>

## Portable music players

It is possible to connect your hearing aid(s) to a portable music player, such as a MP3 player, iPod or personal radio, using either a loop system or 'direct input' wires with a suitable hearing aid connector or 'shoe'. There are solutions available for

people with only one hearing ear or who wear just one hearing aid, so that they can 'listen' to both channels of a stereo sound source. 'Direct input' leads can be used with any equipment with a headphone socket, to also include tablets, computers and more. Please see 'Private purchase of equipment' section below for details of specialist suppliers of equipment for the hearing impaired for more information.

## **Outside the home**

Cinemas or theatres may have headsets, loop systems, or captioned showings. Theatres may have signed showings. Contact your local venues for further details. It is a good idea to mention your needs when booking tickets.

## **Obtaining ALDs**

ALDs may be available free of charge through social services or can be bought privately. It is likely to be useful to have a demonstration or trial of equipment wherever possible. Whenever buying new electronic equipment for the home check whether it has the features you might need for your hearing impairment or to be compatible with any assistive listening devices you might need. Please see the Audiology Department 'Access to Work' leaflet to see if you might be eligible for help to obtain equipment for use at work.

## **Social Services**

Some equipment may be available free of charge through social services dependent upon where you live and your individual circumstances. Social services may also have equipment that they can demonstrate to you, even though the equipment is not available free of charge from them, but so you can try it before you purchase anything. You can contact social services directly or ask your audiologist or the Audiology Department to refer you. You may be able to access a referral form to complete online if you are not able or prefer not to use the telephone.

An assessment with social services may be carried out over the phone and/or during a visit to your home. It can be more effective to assess your personal needs via a home visit so that your individual circumstances in the home can be taken into account.

Contact details of social services for sensory support are listed below:

## **Sensing Change Suffolk**

Website: [www.sensingchange.org.uk](http://www.sensingchange.org.uk)

Email: [sensingchangeinfo@suffolk.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:sensingchangeinfo@suffolk.gcsx.gov.uk)

Telephone: 01473 260030

Textphone: 01473 711825

### **Norfolk Sensory Support (Provide support for Deafblind and British Sign Language [BSL] users only)**

Website: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/social\\_care\\_health](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/social_care_health) (“\_” between words)

Email: [information@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:information@norfolk.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0344 800 8020

Textphone: 0344 800 8011

### **Cambridgeshire Sensory Services**

Website: [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/careandsupport](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/careandsupport)

Email: [careinfo@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:careinfo@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0345 045 5202

### **Essex ECL Sensory Service**

Website: [www.eclsensoryservice.org](http://www.eclsensoryservice.org)

Email: [sensoryservice@essexcares.org](mailto:sensoryservice@essexcares.org)

Telephone: 03330 133 262

Textphone: 01245 261715

## **Private purchase of equipment**

Below are the details of some well-known suppliers of equipment for the hearing impaired. You may be able to obtain the same or similar equipment from other suppliers or via general online shopping sites. With the suppliers listed below some items may be exempt from VAT if you have a hearing impairment. You will need to complete a form to this effect and submit with your order to obtain the lower price.

### **Action on Hearing Loss (Please quote ‘West Suffolk’ when ordering)**

Website: [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

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

Telephone: 03330 144525

Textphone: 03330 144530

### **Connevans (Please quote ‘West Suffolk’ when ordering)**

Website: [www.connevans.info](http://www.connevans.info)

Email: [info@connevans.com](mailto:info@connevans.com)  
Telephone: 01737 247571  
Textphone: 01737 644016

### **Sarabec (Please quote 'West Suffolk' when ordering)**

Website: [www.accesstosound.com](http://www.accesstosound.com)  
Email: [mail@sarabec.co.uk](mailto:mail@sarabec.co.uk)  
Telephone: 01642 247789  
Textphone: 01642 244148

Quoting 'West Suffolk' on your order helps support the Audiology Department to have demonstration equipment.

### **Other contacts**

#### **Audiology Department, West Suffolk Hospital**

Post: Audiology Department, West Suffolk Hospital, Hardwick Lane, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 3QZ  
Website: <http://www.wsh.nhs.uk/Services-A-Z/Audiology/Audiology.aspx>  
Telephone: 01284 713507  
Email: [audiology@wsh.nhs.uk](mailto:audiology@wsh.nhs.uk) (Please state your name, contact details and concern in the email, and you will receive a response within seven working days)

#### **References**

*Healthy Hearing. Top Five Assistive Listening Devices.*

<http://www.healthyhearing.com/report/52538-Top-five-assistive-listening-devices>, 17/7/17.

*'Assistive Listening Devices'. Audiology Department, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, April 2016.*

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)*

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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