



# Assistive Technology facts

## ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES

*I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen.*

*- Ernest Hemingway*

### **What is assistive technology?**

Assistive technology, or AT, is any tool that allows individuals with disabilities to use their own unique abilities to reach their goals. AT can range from low-cost tools such as a jar opener to more complex devices such as a power wheelchair or communication aid.

Infants, children, adults, and older persons with any type of disability can be aided by the use of AT.

### **What is an assistive listening device?**

This assistive technology category includes equipment that makes auditory information accessible to those with hearing loss, either by amplifying the sound or converting it into visual or tactile information. There are four main categories of assistive listening devices: alerting, listening, telecommunication, and closed captioning.

### **Who is affected by hearing loss and deafness?**

Nationally, about 28 million people have some sort of hearing loss. Individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf come from all cultures and age groups. Hearing loss is among the most common disabilities in the United States.

### **What types of devices are available for those with hearing loss?**

• **Alerting devices** are devices that use flashing lights or vibration to inform users with a hearing loss to sounds in their envi-

ronment. Some devices respond to one specific sound while others react to a variety of stimuli.

• **Listening aids** are tools that enhance hearing in daily communications. This category includes hearing aids and amplification devices that mitigate the effects of distance, background noise, and poor acoustics.

• **Telecommunication devices** are items that help those with a hearing loss communicate over the phone. There are two different styles of devices. The first is an auditory device which amplifies the telephone signal. The second type allows deaf persons to communicate over telephone lines via print or a combination of print and voice.

A text telephone device (TTY) enables the user to send and receive information in text form. If the person on the other end of the phone prefers to speak rather than type, the telephone relay service can be used to translate the TTY's text into speech, and the partner's speech into text so it can be displayed on the TDD.

Likewise, voice carryover (VCO) phones enable the user to utilize natural speech for transmitting information and text—via the relay operator—for receiving information. People who use sign language to communicate are now able to communicate over standard phone lines using new video

relay technology. Equipment needs include a phone line, a telephone, a web camera, and the assistance of an interpreter.

- **Closed captioning decoders** provide access to television programming by translating the auditory information into print that scrolls across the bottom of the screen.

### Where can I purchase assistive listening devices?

Telecommunication and alerting devices, along with closed captioning decoders, can be purchased without a doctor's prescription. The phone company, local electronics stores, and online vendors all sell these types of devices.

The first step in selection of a hearing aid or other listening device is evaluation by a doctor or audiologist. This is essential because people vary in the nature of their hearing losses, and a device perfect for one person would be useless for another. Once the appropriate product has been identified, it can be purchased through an audiologist or a hearing aid specialist. After being fitted for the device, several adjustment appointments and training session may be required to maximize the user's benefit from the device.

### What are some things I should consider before purchasing an assistive listening device?

- In what situations do I have difficulty hearing?
- What is the extent of my hearing loss?
- What funding resources are available for my purchase?
- What are my strengths, needs, and preferences?



DATI fact sheets are available on the following topics:

- ◆ Adapted Toys
- ◆ Aids for Daily Living
- ◆ Aids for Low Vision
  - ◆ Assistive Listening Devices
- ◆ Augmentative and Alternative Communication
- ◆ Computer Access
  - ◆ Seating, Positioning and Mobility
  - ◆ Switches and Environmental Control Units
  - ◆ Tools for Learning



**Listen Personal FM System** is a good small area solution where added listening capability is needed. The transmitter with microphone can be worn or set up on a podium. The receiver and earphone are worn by the listener up to 150 feet away.



The **Ameriphone VCO Telephone** is an amplified, hearing aid compatible phone that allows you to make VCO calls through a TTY relay service.



**Sonic Alert's DS 800 Doorbell/Telephone/Intercom Signaler** flashes a light that is plugged into its outlet and also sends signals to other remote receivers when the doorbell or phone rings.

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative  
Center for Applied Science & Engineering  
University of Delaware/Alfred I. duPont  
Hospital for Children  
PO Box 269, 1600 Rockland Road  
Wilmington, DE 19899-0269  
1(800) 870-DATI or (302) 651-6790  
TDD: (302) 651-6794  
FAX: (302) 651-6793  
dati@asel.udel.edu  
www.dati.org