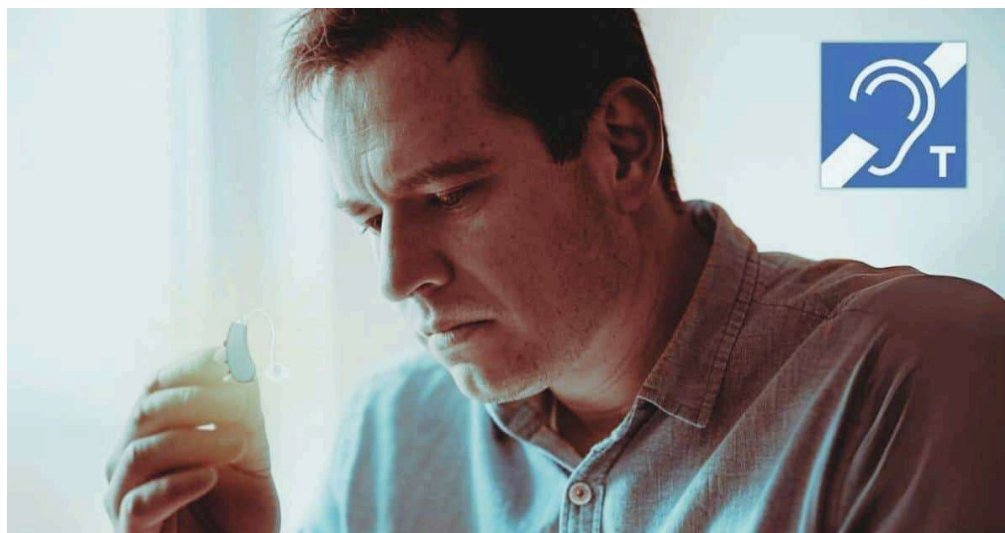


Telecoils – A Well Kept Secret



 HHTM

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By Stephen O. Frazier

Only about half of the hearing aids dispensed in the US contain tiny spools of wire called telecoils. The small coils function as antennas that receive sound via a technology known as a hearing loop, enabling silent transmission. Such loops can take many forms, but the most common is simply a wire loop surrounding a space where people gather to hear sermons, plays, music, or lectures. The wire is connected to a transmitter that is, in turn, connected to a microphone or a public address system.

By turning on the telecoils in their hearing aids, users improve what's called the signal-to-noise ratio, with the sound from the loop "covering" background sounds and reverberation, giving what's being said more clarity. By turning off the mics in their



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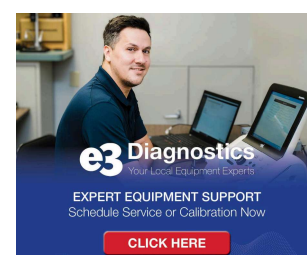
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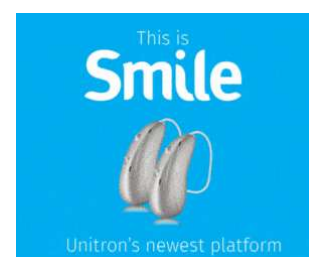
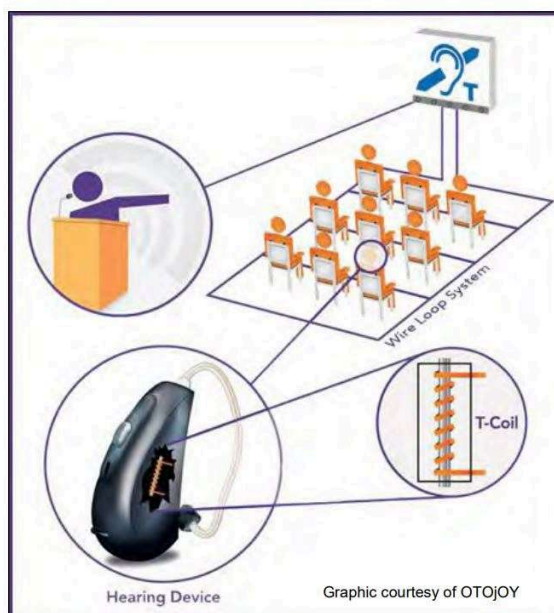
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hearing aids, even more background sound is eliminated and virtually all that's being heard is the sound coming from the hearing loop.

This technology is a godsend to people with hearing loss once they learn about it, and that is where there's a big problem – too many are never told about the technology. A relatively recent survey found that, in states with a regulation that requires the counseling of hearing aid buyers on telecoil technology before fitting them with hearing aids, 53% of respondents reported that they had not received such counseling prior to the purchase of their current hearing aids. For people living in states without such a regulation, the figure was even higher – 60%. As these percentages show, even in states that mandate such counseling, it's not done by far too many providers.

Many hearing care providers who fall into that category will tell clients about the technology if they feel the client can benefit from it. That's just not right! Even if regulations don't mandate it, the client has a right to be told about the telecoil



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option. He or she can then decide if it would be helpful. At one time, there were few opportunities to actually use telecoils, but over the last decade, there have been hundreds of theaters and performance spaces looped, and literally thousands of places of worship now offer them.

Airports are installing hearing loops. Amtrak is equipping the passenger cars on its new trains and ticket counters in their stations with them. They can be found in subway cars and taxicabs. When traveling abroad, they are even more abundant in those locations and others.

Another defense for not counseling clients on telecoils is Bluetooth®. They said telecoils are not needed if you have Bluetooth. Bluetooth offers functions that telecoils cannot, but it doesn't improve hearing in theaters or places of worship—telecoils can.

The new Bluetooth technology – **Auracast™** – will make that possible but it will take many years before it is available in the many locations where hearing loops are found. To ensure optimal communication access in various situations, buyers should seek hearing aids that incorporate all three technologies.

I recently had reason to visit three different hearing care providers, and those visits confirmed the findings of the CCAA survey. Only after I raised the issue was there any discussion of telecoils. One, in practice for over sixteen years, questioned why I would have two telecoil settings on my hearing aids – a telecoil setting and a telecoil plus microphone setting. She made it clear that she tells clients about telecoils only if she feels they would use them, and was not familiar with the New Mexico licensing board's mandate that all clients should receive that counseling. Further, none of the three had any means of demonstrating the technology to both familiarize clients with telecoils, and to adjust them for peak performance.

The phrase “buyer beware” was first used 500 years ago. It first appeared in English in 1523 in a book on animal husbandry by John Fitzherbert, who used it to warn buyers about the risks of purchasing a horse. Today, it certainly applies to those purchasing hearing aids. Doing good homework can prepare hearing aid buyers to

know about the secret technology called telecoils and how they add functionality to hearing aids unmatched by other useful but not all-inclusive optional hearing aid features.

About the Author



Stephen O. Frazier, trained by the Hearing Loss Association of America as a Hearing Loss Support Specialist, is a freelance writer with a focus on hearing loss issues. He was the organizer and chair of the Committee for Communication Access in America. He has presented workshops on a variety of hearing loss related topics to

local, state and national audiences and his written work has appeared in most of the major hearing care and hearing loss related journals, blogs and newsletters. Many of his writings are posted at www.sofnabq.com. He can be reached at hlaanm@juno.com.