

## Hearing on the phone!

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Even with a minimal degree of hearing changes, hearing on the phone can be a challenge. This can be true for a variety of reasons. It is always harder to hear when you cannot see someone. As my mother always says, *(even though she wears hearing aids) "I have to put on my glasses so I can hear you."* Even without hearing loss, absolutely everyone hears better if they can see the person who is speaking.

Whether you are aware of it or not, almost everyone can read lips to some extent. This is why it is so bothersome to watch a video when the sound and lips do not match. The human brain is programmed to combine what is heard with what is seen in order to make sense of what is being said. In addition, if the person to whom we are talking is familiar and they are talking about something we know a lot about, it is also much easier to hear.

As you can see, not having these benefits leads to a significant disadvantage on the telephone. On the phone, we do not have the advantage of seeing the person we are talking to. In addition, the topic of conversation may not be immediately known or familiar. Luckily, there are several options to enhance listening on the phone, such as amplified phones or captioned phones. Simply put, amplified phones are much louder than a "regular" phone. These devices can be a wireless or wired phone and come with and without answering machines. Captioned phones have the option to have a transcript of the conversation displayed on a small monitor near the phone. If you are having a particularly challenging conversation, by the push of a one button you can read what is being said. My patients have found this particularly helpful when talking with unfamiliar people, such as when calling the doctor's office, calling customer service numbers or ordering takeout food. Assistance is also available for cell phone communication.

Funding to purchase this assistive technology is often available through the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP). More information can be found at <https://psc.wi.gov/consumerInfo/assistancePrograms/tepp/tepp-ind.htm> (or just search for "TEPP Wisconsin" in your web browser).



**The website explains TEPP in the following way:**

*“The Telecommunications Equipment Purchase program is to help people with disabilities buy specialized equipment that they need in order to use basic telephone services. The TEPP is one of several different programs paid for by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) established by the Public Service Commission. Money collected from Wisconsin telephone services providers goes into the USF.”*

The TEPP program is not income dependent, so I encourage you to apply for it yourself online or contact your audiologist to apply for you. Once you have applied and been found to qualify, a voucher will be mailed to you or your audiologist. At that time, you can use the voucher to select a phone to meet your needs. Some devices (*such as some Bluetooth-enabled devices*) require prior authorization.

TEPP offers a variety of vouchers that can be used with different vendors to purchase equipment to hear well on the phone. There are different categories, which include: hard of hearing, deaf/severely hard of hearing, speech impaired, mobility impaired, low vision and hard of hearing, and blind and severely hard of hearing. Depending on the challenges an individual faces, different amounts of funding are available toward the purchase of the correct technology to meet your needs. If a person simply needs an amplified phone, the voucher is \$100, which is enough to cover many amplified phone options. Finally, there are ways to work with TEPP to purchase phone-amplification options that can work with hearing aids, as many people with hearing aids need additional assistance for the phone.