Frequently Asked Questions about Hearing Loops

1. **How many Americans live with hearing loss?** The National Center for Health Statistics\(^1\) reports that 1 in 6 (40 million) American adults acknowledge at least “a little trouble hearing.” According to the 2016 National Health and Nutritional Examination Surveys hearing tests of Americans 12 and older, 38 million Americans have at least a 25 dB hearing loss in both ears, as do 60 million in at least one ear. Unlike those challenged by mobility or vision loss, people challenged by hearing loss are often an invisible minority.

2. **Why are hearing loops needed? Don’t hearing aids enable hearing?** Today’s hearing aids enhance hearing in conversational settings. Yet for those with hearing loss, the sound becomes unclear when loudspeakers are distant when the context is noisy, or in rooms that reverberate sound. A hearing loop magnetically transfers a microphone or TV sound signal to hearing aids and cochlear implants that have an inexpensive “telecoil” receiver. This transforms the instruments into in-the-ear speakers that deliver sound customized for one’s own hearing loss.

3. **How many hearing aids have the telecoil (t-coil) receptor for receiving hearing loop input?** In 2017, reports Stephen Frazier, the Consumer’s Guide to Hearing Aids showed that 71% of all hearing aids could be fitted with telecoils, as could 83% of models larger than the miniaturized completely-in-the-canal aid. Moreover, the greater people’s need for hearing assistance, the more often they have hearing aids with telecoils—as did 84 percent of Hearing Loss Association of America members in one survey. New model cochlear implants also offer telecoils.

4. **Can hearing loops serve those without telecoils or even without hearing aids?** Yes, all forms of assistive listening, including hearing loops, come with portable receivers and headsets (though most such units sit in closets unused.)

5. **What does a hearing loop cost?** Costs range from $150 to $300 for self-installed home TV room loops and up to several thousand dollars or more for professional installation in an average-sized auditorium or worship space. Large facilities with embedded metal will be more expensive. Auditorium hearing loops cost somewhat more than do other assistive listening systems, which require a receiver and headset. But the cost per user is typically less (because many more people will use assistive listening that is hearing aid compatible). Moreover, hearing loops offer long-term savings from purchasing and maintaining batteries in fewer portable listening units. For the user, the inexpensive telecoil does not add to the hearing aid price.

6. **Hearing loops harness magnetic energy. So, is magnetic interference problematic?** Generally, not. Old computer monitors, old fluorescent lighting, and some old dimmer switches may generate interference, as do some cars and all airplanes. But the experience in thousands of Midwest venues and those in Scandinavia and the UK is that interference-free installation is nearly always possible.

7. **Isn’t this a decades-old technology?** Like computers, magnetic induction loop technology began some 80 years ago and is now in newly developed forms (with new amplifier and telecoil technologies and new computer-modeled designs for complex installations). The International Hearing Access Committee expects that “TC [telecoils], HL [hearing loops] /ALS [assistive listening solutions] usage will continue for the next 10-15 years and beyond.”

8. **Don’t newer connective technologies work better?** New wireless technologies, including Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, enable binaural phone and stereo TV listening. While helpful in sports

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\(^1\) [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db214.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db214.pdf)
bars and exercise venues, such technologies are not viable for assistive listening. They require significant battery power and cause audio delay, negatively impacting speech intelligibility and music enjoyment. An alternative future assistive listening solution—one that, like hearing loops, is hearing aid compatible — will need similarly to a) be inexpensive (essentially no cost to the consumer), b) be capable of covering a wide area, c) drain little battery power (telecoils require no power), d) be universally accessible worldwide, e) be sufficiently miniaturized to fit in nearly all hearing aids and f) transmit the audio signal without audible latency.

9. **Can hearing loops be used in adjacent rooms?** Yes, with a professional design that controls sound spillover.

10. **Are there advantages to using hearing loops for home TV listening and in public settings?** A hearing aid-compatible loop system delivers sound that’s customized by one’s hearing aids for one’s own ears. It requires no fuss with extra equipment. Rather than plugging one’s ears, it allows the use of a mic + telecoil (M/T) setting that enables one to hear the room conversation or the phone ringing. In public settings, their main advantage is their simplicity: people need only activate their telecoils. There’s no need to get up, seek out, and wear conspicuous equipment (which few people with hearing loss take the initiative to do). Additionally, the sound is contained in one’s ear, without bothering others nearby. There is no need to juggle between headsets and hearing aids (during, say, a worship service). And there are no hygienic concerns about putting in or on one’s ear what has been around others’ ears.

11. **Can hearing loops work in transient venues such as airports, ticket windows, or drive-up order stations?** Indeed, this is why the New York City Transit Authority has installed hearing loops at 488 subway information booths. In such venues, where checkout equipment is not realistic, the only possible assistive listening device is one’s own hearing aid or cochlear implant.

12. ** Aren't Britain's thousands of loop systems in transient venues sometimes not working?** The Royal National Institute for Deaf People did find that many loops in shops and other transient venues were not working. Their response was not to discount hearing assistance in such venues, but rather to undertake an awareness campaign to see that the devices are turned on and operating, much as wheelchair ramps need to be kept open. Any assistive listening will not work unless turned on.

13. **Who makes hearing loops and where can they be purchased?** A variety of established European and mostly new American manufacturers are designing and marketing hearing loop amplifiers for a wide variety of installations, from home TV rooms to taxi back seats and ticket windows to cathedrals. See [www.hearingloop.org/vendors.htm](http://www.hearingloop.org/vendors.htm).

14. **Do hearing loops meet the 2010 ADA standards for Accessible Design?** Hearing loop systems are compatible with all telecoil-equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants. (See [2010 Standards for Accessible Design](#))