Listening equipment
Listening equipment

This factsheet is part of our Equipment range. It is written for people with all types of hearing loss who want to know about listening equipment that might help. Manufacturers may use other names for listening equipment, such as personal listeners, personal listening aids, conversation aids, assistive listening devices and TV listening or sound systems.

Read this factsheet to find out:

- What does listening equipment do?
- What types of listening equipment are available?
- Can listening equipment be used with hearing aids?
- Can I use listening equipment to listen to a loop system?
- What kind of listening equipment is suitable for education and work?
- Can I get equipment to help me hear conversations or the radio in the car?
- Can I get help with paying for equipment?
- Where can I get further information?

If you would like this factsheet on audio tape, in Braille or in large print, please contact our helpline – see front page for contact details.

Important safety information

Listening equipment can be very loud. When switching on, always start at a low volume and gradually increase it to a level that you are comfortable with, but avoid having it louder than you really need. If you are concerned about your hearing, talk to your GP or audiologist.

What does listening equipment do?

Listening equipment amplifies sound and makes it louder. It can help you to hear conversation more clearly at home, in meetings, lectures or in the car. It can also help you to hear the television, radio or hi-fi more clearly.

What types of listening equipment are available?

Basic listening equipment

Intended for listening to conversation at close range (up to about 2 to 4 metres), this has a built-in microphone, volume control and headphone socket. It may also have a tone control. Most basic types are supplied with headphones or earphones.

Price: £10-30

Listening equipment with advanced features

Intended for listening to conversation at close range or from across a room (using an extension microphone), and for listening to TV, radio or hi-fi using a direct connection lead. In addition to the
built-in microphone, volume control and headphone socket, an advanced personal listener will have some or all of the following features:

- Tone control (to enhance or boost the higher audio frequency ‘treble’ sounds).
- Balance control to adjust the volume level on the left and right side on headphone and earphones.
- Extension microphone (which may be supplied or available as an optional accessory).
- Directional microphone that reduces sounds from the side and rear (for use in meetings, lectures).
- Direct connection to TV, radio, hi-fi via a lead (which may be supplied or available as an optional accessory).
- Volume level (loudness) indicator.
- Tone setting indicator.
- Loop listening, for using audio induction loop systems in cinemas, theatres, meetings or banks – see page 6.
- Can be used with neckloop or ear hook, which allows you to use listening equipment with your hearing aids when they are switched to the T setting/ hearing loop programme.
- Automatic gain control (AGC) which automatically reduces the amplification on very loud sounds, while increasing it on quiet sounds.
- Digital Signal Processing (DSP) – this is similar to the technology used in digital hearing aids. It used to control the amount of amplification at different frequencies and reduces acoustic feedback, a whistling or howling sound when the volume is too high.
- Battery level and low battery indication.

**Wireless listening equipment**

This will have all, or some of the features listed above. Wireless listening equipment has two parts: a transmitter and receiver (or receivers) linked together either by radio or infrared.

Wireless listening equipment is useful if you want to be able to move around a room easily. It includes:

- Radio and infrared listening equipment.
- Wireless headphones and headsets (see page 5).

You can use it in a range of situations, such as at home, during conversations, or watching TV.

**For people with hearing aids**

Radio and infrared listening equipment for people with hearing aids has a neckloop receiver, or the receiver has a headphone socket to which you can connect a neckloop or ear hook. You need to set your hearing aids to the T setting/ hearing loop programme.

**Price:** £60-£300
For people who do not use hearing aids
You can use some radio and infrared equipment if you do not wear hearing aids. These have a headset receiver, or the receiver has a headphone socket.

**Price:** £60-£300

**Headphones, earphones and headsets**
Different types of headphones, earphones or headsets can be used with listening equipment and may be supplied or available as an optional accessory. These include:

- **Over-the-ear and in-the-ear headphones.**
- **Stethoset headsets** – stethoscope-style headphones that are similar to headphones but tend to produce a louder sound. You may find them useful if you have moderate hearing loss.
- **Noise-cancelling headphones.**

**Over-the-ear (OTE) and in-the-ear (ITE) headphones and stethoset headsets**
Most listening equipment comes with OTE, ITE (button style) headphones or stethoset headsets.

ITE headphones help to stop sound from leaking out too much, which means that other people around you cannot hear what you are listening to. ITE headphones may be louder than OTE ones because they fit into the ear. OTE and ITE headphones are suitable for people with normal hearing but you may also find them useful if you have mild to moderate hearing loss.

The frequency range of stethoset headsets is limited compared with OTE or ITE headphones, so their sound quality may not be as good. Take extra care when you use them, because they are very loud.

**Price:** From £10

**Noise-cancelling headphones**
Noise-cancelling headphones reduce constant background noise, such as the noise on an aeroplane. They are used with personal music players, MP3 players and personal radios. By reducing background noise they allow you to hear your music player more clearly and may be suitable for people with mild to moderate hearing loss.

**Price:** From £50

**Can listening equipment be used with hearing aids?**
Most listening equipment can be used with hearing aids on the T setting/hearing loop programme. A neckloop or ear hook is required to plug into the headphone socket on the listening equipment. These are either supplied or available as an optional accessory.

**Neckloops**
If you wear hearing aids, a neckloop may suit you better than headphones. A neckloop is a loop of wire that goes around your neck. It plugs into the headphone socket on most listening equipment. You need to change your hearing aids to the T setting/hearing loop programme to pick up the signal from the loop.
If you use a neckloop with stereo equipment, such as a personal music player, MP3 player or radio, it will give mono sound – not stereo. However, if you have two hearing aids, you can listen in stereo by using a ‘dual’ ear hook or silent headphones – see below.

**Price:** £10-£30

### Ear hook

An ear hook works in a similar way to a neckloop but it hooks over your ear next to your hearing aid. To pick up the signal from the ear hook, change your hearing aid settings to T / hearing loop programme. You can use an ear hook on either your left or right ear, depending on which side you use your hearing aid. You can also get a ‘dual’ ear hook, for both ears. You can use these to listen to your personal stereo if you use hearing aids in both ears.

**Price:** £15-£25

### ‘Silent’ headphones

If you prefer not to use neckloops or ear hooks, you may find a pair of ‘silent’ headphones useful. They look like headphones, but produce a magnetic signal like a neckloop or ear hook. You’ll need to set your hearing aids to T / hearing loop programme to use them. You can use silent headphones with most personal stereos and you can also use them with your TV and stereo equipment if you have an extension lead.

**Price:** £15-£25

### Wireless headphones

You can get these from high street stores but they are not specifically designed for people with hearing loss. However, they can be useful if you have moderate hearing loss.

There are radio and infrared versions available. Both types have a transmitter that plugs into your TV or stereo system. The cordless headphone receiver will have a volume control and is powered from rechargeable batteries.

The advantage of the radio types is that the headphones can receive the signal from the transmitter anywhere in the home. With infrared types, the headphones only receive the signal in the same room as the transmitter.

**Price:** From £25

### Wireless headsets

These are specifically designed for people with hearing loss and can be very loud. The headset receiver uses a stethoscope style design that is part of the receiver. Radio and infrared versions are available. Both types have a transmitter that plugs in to your TV or stereo. Some are also supplied with an extension microphone. The wireless headset will have a volume control. It may also have a tone control and a balance adjustment so that the volume on the left and right side can be set to a different level.
The advantage of the radio versions is that the headset can receive the signal from the transmitter anywhere in the home. With infrared types, the headset can only receive the signal in the same room as the transmitter.

**Price:** From £60

Can I use listening equipment to listen to a loop system?
You can listen to loop systems in cinemas, theatres, meeting rooms and banks using a hearing aid on the T setting / hearing loop programme. Some listening equipment has a ‘loop listening’ option, and there are also ‘loop listeners’. This allows you to listen to the loop through headphones or headsets.

**Portable induction loop systems**
You can use hearing aids set to T / hearing loop programme, a loop listener or any listening equipment that has a loop listening option with a portable loop system. If you have mild to moderate hearing loss, you can use headphones with listening equipment that has a loop listening option. For more information, see our factsheet, *Loop and infrared systems for people with hearing loss.*

What kind of listening equipment is suitable for education and work?
You can get a range of equipment to use during lectures, meetings and interviews, including conference folders, digital recorders, portable induction loop systems and radio aid systems.

**Conference folder**
You can use these in meetings and small groups to help you hear what people are saying. It is battery-operated, looks like a folder, and has a built-in induction loop and microphone. You can plug in an extension microphone, neckloop or headphones. You can also plug a tape recorder or a digital recorder into a conference folder to record the conversation.

**Price:** £300

**Digital recorder**
A digital recorder can record memos, messages and dictation. It has a built-in microphone and is battery-powered. Most digital recorders are supplied with headphones, but if you prefer, you may be able to use a neckloop or ear hook instead.

**Price:** From £20

**Radio microphone systems**
These are designed for use in classrooms, lecture halls and other similar settings. They can help students hear the teacher, lecturer, or other students. The radio receiver can be used with headphones, headset or a neckloop; some will work with cochlear implants. Most systems have a hand-held or tie-clip wireless microphone. Some radio microphone systems need to be professionally installed, but others don’t.

**Price:** £250-£1,000
Can I get equipment to help me hear conversations or the radio in the car?
There are loops you can fit in vehicles. **Price**: £100-£150 (plus installation costs). For more information, see our factsheet *Loop and infrared systems for people with hearing loss*.

**Intercom**
An intercom can help you and your passengers to chat while in the car. A simple system includes a personal listener, microphone, headphones or earphones. You may be able to use a neck or ear hook and listen with your hearing aid on the T setting / hearing loop programme. However, before you buy an intercom or personal listener, check that your hearing aids do not pickup interference from your vehicle’s ignition system or electrical wiring.

**Price**: From £50 (installation extra)

Do you find it hard to use small, awkward or heavy equipment?
Nowadays a lot of equipment has tiny and often quite fiddly buttons and other controls. Sometimes equipment will just be an awkward shape or maybe it is too heavy for you to use. If you have these sorts of difficulties, it is particularly important to try out equipment before you buy. Check:

- Are the buttons easy for you to press?
- Can you use the other controls easily?
- Is the labelling on the controls easy to read?
- Can you hold the equipment comfortably?
- Is the equipment too heavy for you?

Can I get help with paying for equipment?

- Contact our helpline (see front cover) for information about help paying for equipment.
- Social services may help to pay for or provide equipment. For more information, see our factsheet *Social services for adults who are deaf*.
- The Access to Work scheme may help to pay for equipment you need at work, or, if you are unemployed, for interviews. See our leaflet *Benefits and services*.
- The Equality Act requires service providers, such as hospitals and GP surgeries, to provide equal access for everyone including people with disabilities such as hearing loss. See our factsheet *The Equalities Act 2010 – a guide for service users*.

Where can I get further information?

**Further information from Action on Hearing Loss**
Our helpline offers a wide range of information on many aspects of hearing loss. You can contact us for further copies of this factsheet and our full range of factsheets and leaflets – see the cover page for contact details.

**Action on Hearing Loss Information, March 2012**