

Too many hearing aid users not aware of hearing loop opportunities

YOUR TURN . The Post - Crescent ; Appleton, Wis. [Appleton, Wis]03 Dec 2017: E.2.

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FULL TEXT

In 1978 in a Dutch school, I heard a teacher say, "Class, turn your hearing aids to hearing loop." "What's a loop?" I asked. The teacher explained it is a wire surrounding the classroom that silently sends sound via magnetic waves to telecoils.

"What's a telecoil?" I asked, and learned it's a tiny antenna found in hearing aids that receives the loop's silent signal and turns it into clear sound. Then, it became obvious, the children could hear the teacher very well.

Fast forward to 1982, I am in a hard-of-hearing classroom in Oshkosh, once again observing kids as part of my audiology studies. But rather than use telecoils in their own hearing aids, the students were using boxy FM systems strapped to their chests. "Don't you use hearing loops?" I asked, and was told FM systems, systems that require the end user to pick up a receiver box with headphones or earplugs, were the systems of choice.

During the 1990s, I shared this information with hundreds of clients in the Fox Valley and actively encouraged them to pick up these headphone-equipped devices, yet wondered why few did. Why would consumers who have trouble hearing not avail themselves of something that helps them hear in places where hearing aids are unable to deliver?

The answer came years later, while attending a meeting for adults with hearing loss. David Myers, a hard-of-hearing psychology professor, explained people don't want to also pick up a listening device. They want technology that broadcasts audio wirelessly to existing hearing aids. He described how loops were making a comeback here and around the world and that this was good news for hearing aid users. Much like wheelchair ramps are good news for people in wheelchairs.

Since then loops have made their way into communities in the Fox Valley and beyond; much to the delight of those consumers who know about telecoils in hearing aids.

In Wisconsin, some 60-plus libraries' meeting rooms and information desks, nearly a dozen school auditoriums, more than 330 houses of worship and well-known venues such as the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in Appleton, The Grand Oshkosh, the Ft. Atkinson Dinner Theater and American Players Theater in Spring Green, have installed the technology.

Consumers rave that in the loop they can hear every word as though they're standing next to the performers on stage or the minister at the altar.

Nowadays, I teach consumers how to live with hearing loss on behalf of the Hearing Loss Association of America. Yet too often I am asked, "What's a telecoil?" "Do I have telecoils in my hearing aids?" or "Why wasn't I told when I

bought my hearing aids?" I've heard "Why wasn't I told?" around the state and country.

Participants in my classes are surprised to learn telecoils are a no or low-cost option in most hearing aids. They tell me they weren't told about the technology when fitted. They are not alone. A recent survey revealed only one out of three users were told about this feature when first buying hearing aids. If consumers aren't told, how can they benefit from recent federal mandates that all public assistive listening systems be telecoil compatible?

Our state is blessed with many competent, conscientious hearing care providers who tell clients about telecoils, demonstrate loops in their offices and inform clients where loops can be found. It appears, though, that many providers fail to do so. How else can I explain the "why" questions I get?

Providers seem to make a decision that should be the prerogative of their clients with hearing loss. Clients, about to spend thousands of dollars on hearing aids, deserve to be told about the usefulness of all hearing aid features to make an informed purchase.

Don't know if your devices have telecoils? Ask your provider —they may be there, but never activated. Ready to buy new hearing aids? Ask for telecoils and a demonstration. Buying hearing aids without telecoils is like buying a car without headlights. You may not plan to drive your car at night, but when you find yourself in the dark, you'll be awfully glad you did.

To learn more about hearing loops and telecoils visit www.hearingloss.org. To find places that offer them in Wisconsin visit www.LoopWisconsin.com.

Juliëtte Sterkens of Oshkosh is a retired audiologist, and a consultant to the Hearing Loss Association of America

LISTEN UP

A growing number of venues, churches and libraries are installing hearing loops. Here's a guide to locations with hearing loops in the Fox Cities and beyond courtesy of Loop Wisconsin.

Appleton

All Saints Episcopal Church

Appleton Lions Club noon meetings

Appleton Public Library

Audiology & Hearing Services/Dr. Mike Thelen

Covenant Reformed Christian Church

Faith Lutheran Church

First Congregational Church

First English Lutheran Church

First United Methodist Church

Fox Cities Performing Arts Center

Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist

Fox Valley Lutheran High School auditorium

Fox Valley Technical College's Bordini Center

Heritage and Peabody senior communities

Hope Lutheran Brethern Church of Appleton

Lions Club of Appleton (at Grand Meridian)

Memorial Presbyterian Church (three locations)

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

St Bernadette Catholic Church

St Bernard Catholic Parish

St John's Lutheran Church

St. Joseph Catholic Church

St Fidelis Friary

St Mary Catholic Church

St Matthew Lutheran Church

St Pius Catholic Church

Xavier High School auditorium

Zion Lutheran ELCA Church

Zounds Hearing Aids office

Black Creek

Village Library

Brillion

Holy Family Catholic Church

Public Library

Chilton

Public Library

Ebanezer United Church of Christ

Clintonville

St Martin Lutheran Church

Public Library

Darboy

Holy Spirit Catholic Church

Fremont

Immanuel Lutheran Church

Neuschafer Public Library

Hilbert

St. Mary's Catholic Church

Hortonville

Hortonville Municipal Building

Hortonville Public Library

Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Church

Kaukauna / Little Chute / Combined Locks

Kaukauna High School Theater

Public Library

St. John Nepomucene Catholic Church

St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church

St. Paul's Catholic Church

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

St. Paul Elder Services

Kimberly

Holy Spirit Catholic Parish

Manawa

Sturm Memorial Library

Neenah / Menasha

Boys and Girls Brigade

Calvary Bible Church

Congregational Church

Elisha D. Smith Public Library

Presbyterian Church

First United Methodist Church

Fox Valley Hearing Center/ThedaCare

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Immanuel Lutheran Church

Winnebago County's Neenah Human Services building

Martin Luther Church

Neenah Public Library

Our Saviors Lutheran Church

Peace Lutheran Church

St. Gabriel Catholic Church

St John the Baptist Catholic Church

St Mary Catholic Church

St. Mary Catholic High School

St Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church

St Patrick Catholic Church

New London

Most Precious Blood Catholic Church

Public Library

Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church

First Congregational Church

Mosquito Hill Nature Center

Seymour

Muehl Public Library

St. Sebastian Catholic Church

Waupaca

First United Methodist Church

Immanuel Lutheran Church

Parfreyville United Methodist Church

Riverside Medical Center

St Mark's Episcopal Church

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Church

Trinity Lutheran Church

Victory Church

Waupaca High School Performing Arts Center

Waupaca Public Library

Weyauwega

Public Library

St. Peter Lutheran Church

Winneconne

St Mary Catholic Church

St Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

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