



# Mobile phones



Promoting access to  
electronic communica-  
tions for deaf people

[www.tagcomm.org.uk](http://www.tagcomm.org.uk)

[tagenquiries@hotmail.com](mailto:tagenquiries@hotmail.com)

The growth of mobile communications has opened a new world for deaf and hard of hearing people. As is the case with many other technical developments, access to services is not always trouble-free, and this fact sheet contains general guidance which we hope will be of help.

TAG's basic advice is to try before you buy if at all possible. Do not expect sales people in mobile phone shops to be fully aware of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing customers.

And don't forget there is usually a period after purchase (often 14 or 28 days) during which you can return equipment which is not satisfactory and obtain a full refund.

## **Mobile phones for hard of hearing people**

The signal created by digital mobile phones can cause interference with hearing aids, but the extent of the problem varies from individual to individual, and depends on the type of hearing loss, the type of hearing aid and the model of mobile handset used. Finding the best combination of handset and hearing aid is something that can only be determined by experience. Always try a handset with your hearing aid to make sure it works to your satisfaction before you make a purchase. While it may be possible to find a handset that suits you, some people may find that no matter what they try they still hear interference. Putting a distance between the phone and your hearing aid by using an *accessory* may help

to reduce interference.

Accessories that may help are neck loops and similar devices. However, these accessories may only work with particular handsets, and may not always solve the problem, so again it is essential to try them before purchasing. The sound quality and volume on cheap digital mobile handsets may not be of the highest quality. The more you are prepared to pay, the better the sound quality you are likely to obtain. Again, experiment to find the handset that gives you the sound quality you require.

## **Mobile phones for profoundly deaf people**

If you have insufficient hearing to use a mobile phone even with accessories you need to consider text options. The best known is SMS, which stands for Short Message Service, otherwise known as texting, a service that is widely used by hearing people as well. All mobile phones now have SMS facilities, but the older mobile phones require a number of key presses to produce a letter of the alphabet. However, most handsets now have predictive text, which means that you only need to press each key once for each letter and the software in the handset works out what word you are typing (though you can change it if it chooses wrongly). You can also consider using a chat board - a small keyboard with all the individual letters that plugs into the mobile handset - or a handset with a folding keyboard. SMS has some limitations. Each

message can only be up to 160 characters in length. If your message is longer you can type it out in one go but it may be sent and charged as separate messages. The use of abbreviations is common to keep the length of messages to a minimum, e. g. "c u tmw" for "See you tomorrow". Also SMS is not real time communication. When the message is sent it goes to a message centre, which then transmits it to the other phone. Normally this is almost instantaneous but if the network is very busy, or the receiving phone is turned off or out of signal range, there can be a delay before the SMS is delivered. You then have to wait for the other person to receive the message and reply. Until quite recently SMS was only possible between one mobile phone and another, but there are now also fixed line telephones that can send and receive SMS messages, and accessories that you plug into your home phone line for the same purpose.

Usage of SMS is growing and both the AA and the RAC now have SMS numbers that mobile users can call to report a breakdown. The AA SMS number is 07900 444 999 and the RAC number is 07855 82 82 82.

If you are normally only going to use your mobile for sending and receiving SMS ask if the provider has a tariff that provides data minutes rather than voice minutes. Bear in mind that if you have a data only tariff you would not be able to use the mobile to make voice calls in an emergency.

Real time text communication requires special mobile handsets with textphone software in them or the ability to link your mobile handset to a mobile textphone. From the start of 2004 mobile networks have had new obligations to provide access to a relay service, and therefore handsets with added textphone software should become available from all the major providers. TAG will continue to lobby to ensure that all these services are of the highest possible quality.

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