Australian Government
Department of Health

Hearing Services Program

Telecoils and hearing loops

Telecoils are a useful but often underused feature of many hearing devices. Hearing loops are used in conjunction with a telecoil to help you hear better in challenging listening situations.

What is a telecoil?

A telecoil is a small coil of wire that is placed inside a hearing device. The telecoil is designed to pick up an amplified magnetic signal. There are a variety of names used to describe this feature, including telephone switch, T-switch, and T-coil. These names are referring to the same technology.

Most hearing devices have a telecoil, however some of the smaller devices may not have enough space to include one. Under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (the program), your hearing services provider is required to offer you a hearing device which has a telecoil in the first instance, a large number of the fully subsidised hearing devices have a telecoil fitted. You can then choose a device without a telecoil if you wish.

How does a telecoil work?

Hearing device microphones are designed to pick up sounds around you, mostly those closest to you. In some situations this can make it harder for you to hear. Examples of this include when you are trying to listen to one person talking in a noisy room, or if you are a distance away from the sounds you are trying to hear, such as in a lecture or at the theatre. A telecoil may make listening in these situations easier.

When the telecoil is activated (either manually by a button on the hearing device, or as an automatic feature of your hearing device) the hearing device microphones will turn off, and the telecoil will pick up an amplified electromagnetic signal. This magnetic signal can come from a variety of sources, such as a compatible telephone or an assistive listening system like a hearing loop. The hearing device converts this signal to sounds that you can hear. The telecoil reduces the background noises, giving better sound quality.

What is a hearing loop?

Hearing loops can also be known by a range of different names, such as an audio frequency induction loop, an induction loop, or just a “loop”. It is an assistive listening system which can transmit sounds to the telecoil in a hearing aid or to other types of hearing devices for people who don’t wear hearing aids.

How do a telecoil and a hearing loop work together?

A hearing loop system is a wire placed around an area, such as a particular room, a stage, or an altar in a place of worship. When the hearing loop is turned on, you need to set your hearing device to the telecoil program. The telecoil will pick up the magnetic signal transmitted by the hearing loop and the hearing device will then convert it into sound which you will hear.

When your hearing device is used in conjunction with your hearing device telecoil the background noise around you can be greatly reduced while the sound you are trying to hear is clearer. One of the benefits of a hearing loop is that the transmitted signal fills the whole space, improving the sound quality when the source of the sound is some distance from you, for example a speaker presenting at a conference at the front of the room, and you are seated at the back.

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Where are hearing loops located?

Hearing loops can be found in many different places, especially in public areas. Look for them in places of worship, theatres and cinemas, convention centres, workplaces, lecture halls, train stations, banks and aged care facilities. You may also find them in retail counters, aeroplanes and public transport. Hearing loops can be portable or fixed. Some people even have them installed in their own houses, to help with situations like hearing the television.

Look for the International Deafness Symbol below, which is often used to indicate that a hearing loop has been installed in a public venue.

Where can I find out more information about telecoils and hearing loops?

Your hearing practitioner can talk to you about how to use the telecoil feature on your hearing device.

Advocacy groups for people with hearing loss, such as Better Hearing Australia or Self-Help for the Hard of Hearing are also useful sources of information about both the telecoil and the hearing loop.