

The newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Albuquerque Chapter

WIRED FOR SOUND

Advice From an Audiologist on Your Pathways to OTC: Finding Solutions That Work for You

Thomas A. Powers, Ph.D. (in [HearingLoss.org](https://www.hearingloss.org))

This October, the recently released U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations went into effect, and over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids will be available to those 18 years or older with self-perceived mild to moderate hearing loss. While this is welcomed news for many, it can also be confusing for those who are now thinking about finally addressing their hearing loss, either by themselves with an OTC device, or seeking help from a licensed professional to get a prescription device. I want to share my thoughts with the HLAA community.

My audiology journey began over 35 years ago in private practice. After seeing patients for several years, I accepted a position in the hearing aid industry and worked there for the rest of my career until my retirement. I now consult within the hearing industry. There have been many changes in the technology, including the evolution from analog to digital technology; changes in hearing aid styles from behind-the-ear (BTE) to custom in-the-ear, and now to receiver-in-the-ear (RIC); and of course, the introduction of Bluetooth streaming to capture phone calls and audio directly to your ears. However, the change in the distribution of hearing aids can be both exciting and



overwhelming.

Pathways To Purchase OTC Hearing Aids

There will be multiple pathways to purchase an OTC device, including self-selection, seeing a hearing professional first, or working with a hearing professional after you've purchased an OTC product. The FDA regulations are clear that no state can require a licensed hearing professional to be involved in the sale of OTC hearing aids; however, they can be an important part of the process. Let's review the pathways to purchase:

1. **Self-selection** Adults can visit a retail store that sells OTC devices and select one based on style, cost, technology and the information provided on the required labeling. The labeling includes specific safety information required by the FDA, a guide to environments you may have difficulty listening in if you have mild to moderate hearing loss, additional instructions for use of the devices and, **most importantly, if the devices can be returned if you're not satisfied.** Once purchased, use them in the listening situations you find most challenging to determine if you receive a benefit from the device. These situations include family gatherings, meetings, noisy restaurants, phone calls, or watching TV. If they do not provide benefit, return them prior to the end of the

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is published by the
HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER
Providing support and advocacy for
people with hearing loss

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Hearing Loss Association of
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chapter

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17 Dec Meeting 10:00 AM - Noon On Zoom**Cochlear Implant—the patient’s viewpoint**

For December’s program we are honored to have Maria Jaunakais, AuD, and our own Mary Clark. Maria and Mary will be sharing information about cochlear implants (CI), but not the technology end, nor the manufacturer’s end, but from the user’s point of view, and the initial steps in the process with the



audiologist. Maria is an audiologist with Albuquerque Hearing and Balance who focuses on CI patients exclusively. Mary Clark is a lifelong hearing aid wearer who only recently qualified for a CI in one ear. Our speakers will trace the steps between “maybe?” to the appointment for surgery. They are excited to share a phase of the CI experience that has rarely been explored as a single presentation. Even if you don’t think you’ll ever qualify or be interested in a cochlear implant, please join us for what will undoubtedly be a lively discussion on the process, or the “journey” as it is so often called.

Maria joined Albuquerque Hearing and Balance in September 2017 following three years of clinical practice with Albuquerque Speech Language Hearing Center. She moved to Albuquerque in May 2014 after decades in the humid mid-Atlantic. Maria received her Bachelors in Hearing and Speech Sciences from the University of Maryland in College Park, earned her Doctorate of Audiology from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and completed a one-year fellowship at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Her clinical interests include rehabilitation with hearing instruments in both pediatric and adult populations, cochlear implants in adults, vestibular balance assessments in adults, and custom hearing protection for industrial and recreational settings.

The HLAA ABQ Chapter is always looking for volunteers. You can man a special project. You can help us out for a few months, or consider a longer-term commitment. “Try us out” for a month or two. We will provide orientation for working on a nonprofit board, share our chapter’s mission and goals, and discuss topics we can use your help with. If interested, contact any board member (contact info at left), or use the chapter email hlaabq@gmail.com.

Smith's Community Rewards Shop at Smith's with their Rewards card, and Smith's will make a donation to HLAA Albuquerque chapter. You get your usual rewards points. **Correction:**

1-800-444-8081, opt. 3 to sign up or re-enroll. The HLAAAbq NPO number for Smith's is NC419.

return/trial period. Make sure a **return period**¹ is available, as FDA does not require that one be provided with the purchase of your device.

2. **Visit a hearing professional before making a purchase** An alternative is to visit a hearing professional to have a complete hearing test. You will receive information about your hearing loss and can discuss whether OTC devices may benefit you. You might even purchase the OTC devices at the clinic. Not all hearing professionals will decide to sell OTC devices, but they CAN evaluate your hearing and provide guidance on the appropriate technology for your hearing and lifestyle needs. There may be a cost for the hearing testing and consultation visit.
3. **See a hearing professional if you're struggling with an OTC device** If you have purchased a device that doesn't seem to be working in the way you expected, you can visit a hearing professional to ask questions about the device and your hearing needs. Nearby licensed hearing professionals can be found at [hearing.org/find-a-hearing-professional/](https://www.hearingloss.org/find-a-hearing-professional/). You will benefit from getting a complete hearing test and guidance/counseling on how best to use the device. You may learn that the device you selected is not appropriate for you, or an element of the device is not working properly. Schedule this visit prior to the end of any return period (if applicable) to ensure you can return the products and make a selection that is best for you.

Having a hearing professional involved will provide information and guidance during this

Amazon Smile You can donate to the Albuquerque Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America every time you make a purchase of most of the products from Amazon.

Go to <http://www.hlaabq.com/amazonsmile.html> for more information and detailed instructions on how to designate HLAA-ABQ Chapter as your charity of choice when you make [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) purchases.

Once you have set it up, **always** log into smile.amazon.com to purchase from amazon. 0.5% of the purchase price is automatically donated to HLAA Albuquerque Chapter—at no cost to you.

process. It may be worth the additional cost, e.g. avoiding a device that may not be appropriate for your degree of hearing loss and providing communication strategies for listening in difficult environments like background noise.

The many choices can be confusing for some. I do expect that some experienced hearing aid owners with mild to moderate hearing loss may already have significant experience with devices and elect to purchase OTC products without the assistance of a hearing professional. For new users, the suggested pathways can help lead to successful use of OTC devices. Whatever pathway you choose, be ready to invest time in learning how the devices function, how to insert them, how to change batteries if necessary, how to clean and maintain them, and how to maximize your benefits in difficult listening situations. Hearing is one of our most important senses, and during my career as an audiologist, I have seen the success of those who took action to treat their hearing loss. To reopen your world of sounds, communication, and connections that are most important to you, I encourage you to take that first step.

To help you decide if an OTC hearing aid could work for you, visit our **Tip Sheet**², and stay tuned for more information and resources soon.

For questions, contact HLAA at inquiries@hearingloss.org.

¹ <https://www.hearingloss.org/otc-hearing-aids-returns-a-key-piece-of-the-puzzle/>

² <https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/otc-hearing-devices/>

No Telecoils in Your Hearing Aids? For Some, a Remote Microphone Can Become a Loop Receiver.

Stephen O. Frazier, Hearing Loss Support Specialist

One of the first things people learn at HLAA meetings is that telecoils and hearing loops can be the answer to their prayers for a way to hear in church, at the theatre or at other large gatherings. Those tiny coils of wire turn their hearing aids into personal listening devices that can block out ambient noise and let them hear the sermon, the dialog or the proceedings as if they were standing right next to the person speaking.

Unfortunately, for some, they also learn that their hearing aids either do not have telecoils or the telecoils have not been activated. They may have been told they would not need telecoils because they would have Bluetooth®. That wasn't true until recently. Bluetooth would not serve their needs in the church, theatre or meeting hall; it's a one-to-one technology and cannot, yet, service groups or people. BUT, depending on their make, model and age, there are now instances where Bluetooth can be used to connect to the signal from a hearing loop. That connection can be made with a remote microphone that becomes your personal loop receiver.

A number of hearing aid manufacturers have now added a telecoil to their branded remote microphone. That mic can be set to receive the signal from a hearing loop through its built-in microphone and then transmit the signal via Bluetooth to the user's Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids. Resound, Starkey and Lively are among the brands now offering remote mics with a built-in telecoil. Rexton and Signia had it in their previous remote mics but not in the current version, and with Starkey, it's only in their Microphone+, not their MiniMic. This means that some wearers of newer



hearing aids that do not have telecoils can possibly resolve their hearing loop connectivity problem by investing in such a mic from their provider or an online source. Some of these mics are even available on Amazon, or you can search for other sources with the terms “brand model hearing aid remote microphone with telecoil.”

Those remote mics are also a great way to hear in a noisy environment such as a restaurant—possibly more effective at times that the “noise” or “restaurant” setting in hearing aids. With hearing aids set on telecoil only and the mic clipped to a dinner companion’s lapel, you’ll hear much less of the ambient noise in the room, and the voice of your companion much more clearly.

Remote mics can be found for as little as \$136 for the Starkey MiniMic (no telecoil) or Microphone+ for \$225 at mysecondear.com to \$390 for the Resound MultiMic on Amazon. The latter can also be used as a portable streamer by using the built-in mini jack to connect it to any electronic sound source with a matching jack.

Steve Frazier is the former New Mexico HLAA chapter coordinator and was a founding member of the national HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop committee. Trained by HLAA as a hearing loss support specialist, he has in recent years become a freelance writer on hearing loss and noise control issues and has been published in many of the major hearing loss and hearing care periodicals in addition to others such as Sound and Communications and Technologies for Worship. Many of those articles are posted and www.sofnabq.com. Steve can be contacted at: LoopNM@gmail.com

Yearly dues are \$15 per household.
They are due in January.

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Thanks to those listed below for their generous donations.

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The Hearing Loss Association of America is a volunteer association of Hard of Hearing people, their relatives and friends. It is a non-profit, non-sectarian educational organization devoted to the welfare and interest of those who cannot hear well. Membership in the national organization is by annual dues, which are separate from the annual Chapter fee paid to your local chapter. National membership includes a subscription to the bi-monthly publication Hearing Life.



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A map of Albuquerque, New Mexico, showing the location of the meeting. The map is centered on the area around Indian School Rd NE and Haines Ave NE. A red pin marks the location of Los Altos Christian Church at 11900 Haines Ave NE. Other landmarks shown include Big 5 Sporting Goods, Arby's, Mountainside Church of Christ, and Chelwood Elementary PFO. The Embudo Arroyo is also visible.

Meeting
HLAA Albuquerque Chapter Meetings are held at Los Altos Christian Church,
11900 Haines Ave NE, on the 3rd Saturday of the month, Sep-Jun.
on Zoom