It’s increasingly common to see hearing aid compatible mobile phones with an ‘M’ and ‘T’ rating. What does this mean and how can it help you choose the best phone to use with your hearing aids? Kevin Taylor reports.

Mobile phones produce radio frequency interference that you might hear as an annoying buzzing sound when you bring the phone close to your hearing aid. On some phones, the buzzing can be so severe that it completely drowns out callers’ voices. Low interference phones, however, mean less buzzing (particularly if your hearing aid has good immunity to radio frequency interference). But when choosing a mobile for yourself, how do you know if it’s a low interference model, even if the manufacturer claims it’s ‘hearing aid compatible’? This is where ‘M, T’ ratings can help.

In the USA, mobile phone manufacturers have to provide at least some models that are hearing aid compatible, thanks to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations. From these came the M, T ratings scheme, to help consumers identify the models that would work best with their hearing aids. The scheme was not originally intended to be used outside of the United States, but it’s now gradually being adopted in the UK.

What do the ratings mean?
The ‘M’ refers to the microphone setting on your hearing aids and ‘T’, the loop setting. Some people use the M setting to hear their mobile phone ‘acoustically’ (as you would for normal conversation), while others find it better to switch their hearing aids to the T or loop setting to pick up the loop signal from the handset or the phone’s earpiece.

The M, T ratings are ranked from 1 (poor), through to 3 (good) and 4 (excellent). So, a ‘1’ or ‘2’ rating means that the phone is producing a lot of interference (and possibly a weak loop signal too), while a M4, T4 rated phone is excellent on both microphone and T or loop setting and has the best chance of being interference-free. Of course, other ratings are possible, such as M4, T3, or M3, T4, for instance.

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Here’s some typical examples of ratings for popular phones:

- **iPhone 4 (GSM model)** – M4, T4 on 3G network (850/1900 MHz)
- **Doro PhoneEasy 615** – M3, T4 rating
- **Geemarc Amplified Clamshell mobile CL8400** – M4, T4 rating
- **Amplicom PowerTel M6000** – M3, T3 rating

In practice, it’s the combination of phone and hearing aid that’s important – so although a phone with a 3 or 4 M, T rating is likely to work better with your hearing aids, there is no absolute guarantee as hearing aid susceptibility varies.

Some phone manufacturers don’t give a rating. This doesn’t necessarily mean it won’t work well with your hearing aids; it’s just that they haven’t yet chosen to adopt the M, T ratings.

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**Searching for the right mobile phone**

It can be daunting finding a phone with all the accessibility features you need, but help is at hand. GARI (Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative) is an online searchable database for consumers and professionals alike. Hundreds of mobile phones are listed and the site allows you to search for particular accessibility features under three main headings:

- **Hearing** (including hearing aid compatibility/ M, T ratings)
- **Sight**
- **Mobility and dexterity.**

There’s also a GARI app with the same search features as the website. Not all mobile phone manufacturers have joined GARI, but we hope more will join soon.

*If you want to give GARI a try, go to: mobileaccessibility.info*

The GARI app is available from the Android Market and Nokia Ovi store. “Solutions” Action on Hearing Loss’s catalogue and online shop can also provide guidance:

- **actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop**
- **01733 361 199** (tel)
- **01733 238 020** (textphone)

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