



## Telecommunication Options for People with Spasmodic Dysphonia

For those living with spasmodic dysphonia, the obstacles of working around a voice disorder are all too familiar, and the phone can be a particularly difficult one. There are options out there to assist vocal impairments via specialized telecommunications equipment and phone assistance programs.

The Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) provides an immensely useful online directory for assisting people with voice disorders. This includes a listing of state-specific equipment distribution programs. The type of equipment that's distributed are TTYs, amplified phones, large visual displays, hands free speaker phones, talking phones, and captioned telephones. Living and working with spasmodic dysphonia can be made easier with these products designed to help individuals with vocal impairments. For more information, log on to: <http://www.tedpa.org/>.

### Non-Operator Assisted Resources

#### *Telephone Access Programs*

Many states distribute telecommunications equipment to individuals certified as having difficulty using the telephone. Most of these programs are state-funded such as the Texas Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP) which is administered under the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. It is a voucher program that can assist with the purchase of telephone equipment for residents of Texas who have a disability (not limited to hearing loss) which limits their ability to use the telephone. The program can be accessed once every five years for equipment. The vouchers are available to all who qualify for their service, regardless of income. Members of the NSDA have received an "outgoing voice amplification telephone" for free through this program.

Other programs, such as the California Telephone Access Program (CTAP), have an equipment loan program and the equipment is on loan to the person at no cost. If a voucher program is not available in a particular state, equipment companies may be able to process the purchase through Medicare, Medicaid, and even some managed care insurances. Sifting through all the retailers in one's state to find those which collaborate with assistive programs can be an arduous and time-consuming task but TEDPA has a state directory of vendors who offer this equipment.

*For more information, log on to: <http://www.tedpa.org/>*

#### **Sitris**

Sitris is a web service which enables people with speech difficulties to make assisted telephone calls without an operator through the web interface. Sitris converts text into speech instantly. The user clicks on personal stored phrases or types what to say while on the call and the text is converted to speech to speak into the telephone call. A Sitris call can be made from any PC if you have web access. There is a monthly fee for this service, but when you sign up, you receive 50 minutes for free so you may try it at no cost.

*For more information, log on to: <http://www.mysitris.com>*

## The Speech Assistant

The Speech Assistant is an alternative telephone communication system that combines text-to-speech technology to give persons with speech impairments a new way to "talk" on cordless telephones and cell phones. It allows calls to be made without a third party such as a relay operator. A message is typed either using either text-to-speech software installed on a PC or by using a speech-generating-device (SGD). Dial the number of the party to be called. When the called party answers, "play" the voice audio generated by the typed text from the PC or SGD. The synthesized voice audio goes from the SGD or PC through the audio connector into "The Speech Assistant" which sends the audio directly and instantly through a different audio connector into the cordless telephone or cell phone. Both sides of the call are heard through the provided headset for a completely private and quiet call. There is a fee for the Speech Assistant, but it may be tried for 30 days at no risk.

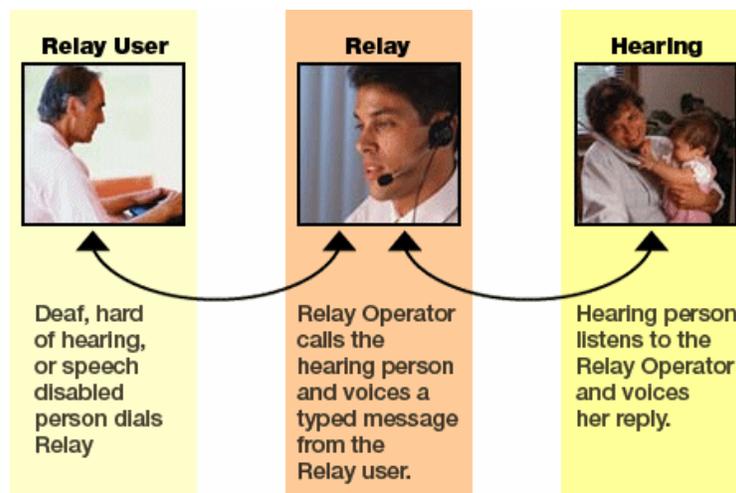
For more information, log on to: <http://www.speechassistant.com/>

## Operator-Assisted Resources

### Telecommunications Relay Service

Telecommunications Relay Service, also known as TRS, Relay Service, or IP-Relay, is an operator service that allows people who are Speech-impaired to place calls to standard telephone users via a keyboard or assistive device. Originally, relay services were designed to be connected through a TDD (TTY) or other assistive telephone device. Services have gradually expanded to include almost any generic connected device such as a personal computer, laptop, mobile phone, PDA, and many other devices.

The following is a step-by-step guide to using TRS to communicate with people. A relay call can be made by TTY, Internet Relay Service, Video Relay Service, or Speech to Speech Relay Service. A relay call can include Voice Carryover ( VCO ) and Hearing Carryover ( HCO ) service. While there is usually no cost for the use of these services, there may be local and long distance charges for the phone call. For more information on these services in your state, log on to: <http://www.tedpa.org/>.



## **Relay Calls On-line**

### **i711.com**

One Internet relay service is called [www.i711.com](http://www.i711.com). The main difference between Internet relay and TTY is that Internet relay uses a computer and an Internet connection (through a modem, Cable or DSL) to give you relay services at no cost. TTY relay uses a (delete) traditional equipment to access relay, and may be slower than Internet relay services. There is no cost to use i711.com including long-distance calls and the service is available 24 hours a day. Also, this service may be available on many BlackBerry models, utilized with AIM (AOL's instant messenger), and allows the storage of a phone book so numbers are accessed easily.

*For more information, log on to:* <http://www.i711.com/>

### **Relay Call via AT&T and AIM**

AT&T IM Relay is available through the AIM messaging application on the web or you may install the software on your PC. Benefits include speed dialing and the ability to receive incoming calls by requesting a free ten digit telephone number.

*For more information, log on to:* <http://www.relaycall.com/national/relay.html>

### **Relay Calls Via Phone**

Please note, dialing 711 allows for direct access to TTY relay services anywhere in the USA and Canada. Most states also have 800 numbers that can be used to connect to TTY services.

### ***TTY Relay Service***

From standard telephone to TTY

In this call type, typed messages are relayed as voice messages by a TRS (Telecommunications Relay Service) operator (also known as *Communication Assistant (CA)*, *Relay Operator (RO)*, *Relay Assistant (RA)* or *Relay Agent (Agent)* ), and vice-versa. This allows callers unable to use a regular telephone, to be able to place telephone calls to people who use a regular telephone, and vice-versa. When the person who is Hearing is ready for a response, it is customary to say "Go Ahead" or "GA" to indicate that it is the TTY user's turn to talk and "Stop Keying", "SK", or "Ready to hang up" when hanging up, and vice-versa.

From standard telephone to TTY:

1. Dial a voice relay operator at 711.
2. Give the relay operator the area code and TTY number you wish to call.
3. The operator will voice what the TTY user says to you and type to the other party what you say.
4. The conversation can go back and forth as long as you wish.
5. You will need to talk slower than usual because everything you say is being typed.
6. There are no charges for using the relay service. Usual charges for local or long distance calls will apply.

From TTY to standard telephone:

1. Dial a TTY relay operator at 711.
2. Give the relay operator the area code and voice phone number you wish to call.
3. The operator will type what the other party voices to you, and voice to the other party what you type on your TTY.
4. The conversation can go back and forth as long as you wish.
5. There are no charges for using TRS. The usual charges for long distance calls will apply.

### ***Hearing Carry Over Relay (HCO)***

Hearing Carry Over Relay (HCO) is for people who can hear but who have difficulty speaking clearly but wish to hear the other party directly. The HCO user types on a TTY what he or she wishes to say and this is spoken by the relay operator to the other party. The conversation continues back and forth this way until both parties conclude the call.

1. For HCO Relay Service, dial 711.
2. Ask the Relay Operator for an HCO call.
3. Give the area code and phone number you wish to call.

### ***Speech To Speech Relay Service (STS)***

Speech to Speech Relay Service makes it possible for people who can hear but who have a speech disability to carry on a telephone conversation with anyone they might wish to communicate. Some STS users communicate with a voice synthesizer or voice enhancer device. As needed, a specially trained STS Relay Operator re-voices what is being said by the STS user. The STS user hears the other party's voice directly. The conversation continues back and forth this way until both parties conclude the call. No special telephone equipment is required.

1. For Speech to Speech Relay Service dial 711
2. Give the Relay Operator the area code and phone number you wish to call.
3. Either party can tell the Relay Operator how active to be in re-voicing.

### **Dialing 9-1-1**

In case of an emergency, Relay users should call 9-1-1 directly or the emergency services center in their community. If a relay user attempts to dial 9-1-1 through a Relay Service, typically, the Relay Operator will transfer the call to the nearest Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), but remember: calls placed directly to emergency service 9-1-1 will save valuable time in urgent situations.

*Disclaimer: The National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association only provides information about these services and products and is not recommending or promoting any one product.*