



# East Bay Chapter: Newsletter November 2024



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## November 9 Meeting: “Navigating the Soundscape: Innovations in Hearing Aid Technology and Beyond”

Presenter: **Susanna Storm, AuD - Blue Sky Hearing**

Description: Join us for an engaging session where we explore the latest advancements in hearing aid technology and discover how assistive devices are transforming lives. Dr. Storm will cover a range of topics, including:

1. Hearing Aid Updates:
  - Learn about cutting-edge models like the Oticon Intent, Widex Smart RIC, Phonak Lumity, and Phonak Life.
  - Understand the pros and cons of rechargeable hearing aids.
  - Dive into the world of binaural processing for enhanced sound perception.
2. Bluetooth Connectivity:
  - Uncover the truth about BT reliability and explore alternative control methods.
3. Custom Earmolds:
  - Discover the differences between Otoscan and Traditional EMI techniques.
  - Get insights into Lumity and Oticon receivers.
4. Essential Accessories:
  - Explore Widex’s Sound Assist, Sound Connect, and their app.
  - Learn about Oticon’s Connect Clip and TV Connector.
  - Peek into Phonak’s Roger accessories.
5. Useful Apps:
  - From real-time captions to auditory training tools, we’ll cover it all.
  - Android vs. iPhone options—find the best fit for you.
6. Beyond Hearing Aids:
  - Neosensory and other exciting innovations.
  - Don’t forget about cochlear implants (CI)!

Whether you’re a hearing aid user, a caregiver, or simply curious, this presentation promises valuable insights and practical tips. Let’s celebrate the power of technology in improving our auditory experiences!

**See event details and sign-up information on Page 2**

## Event Details:

- Date: Saturday, November 9, 2024
- Time: 9:30 Social (with Bagels/coffee/tea); 10:00 Meeting; and 11:30 Pizza Lunch
- Location: Oakland Kaiser Fabiola Building, 3801 Howe Street, Room G26
- Cost: Free

While this session is a hybrid meeting, we encourage you to attend in person for an engaging and informative experience. Enjoy our usual morning coffee and bagels, and stick around after the meeting for pizza lunch (**PIZZA!**). We're looking forward to seeing you there!

**Please RSVP via the link below by close of business on Thursday, November 7, to reserve a spot:**

[Home \(hearinglosseb.org\)](http://hearinglosseb.org) Click on "Meeting RSVP"

**HLAA-EB posts our newsletters to the California State Association webpage and a link on our website. **VOLUNTEER! Contact us to let us know you are available!** Check out our website at: [http://www.hearinglosseb.org/](http://www.hearinglosseb.org) Contact us at: [info@hearinglosseb.org](mailto:info@hearinglosseb.org)**

## MEETING NOTES: *"Over The Counter Hearing Aids: A Consumer's Perspective"*

At our Oct. 12, 2024 HLAA-EB Chapter meeting, our guest speaker was new HLAA-EB chapter member Steve Luzmoor, who provided us with an interesting overview of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids (HA's) from a consumer's perspective. Initially, Steve introduced himself by describing his background and how he came around to purchasing OTC HA's. He then proceeded with some important Food and Drug Administration (FDA) caveats useful in guiding persons considering their options in acquiring HA's and followed up with some FDA advice and examples of confusion in selecting OTC HA's. After sharing his own recent experience in purchasing OTC HA's, Steve spent the remaining time discussing his hands-on research and resources he found about OTC hearing aids. He then wrapped up his presentation with a question & answer session with audience members.



**Our Speaker's Background:** Our speaker Steve Luzmoor did not claim any expertise in hearing loss, but does have a career background in mechanical engineering from which he is currently retired and now spends his free time as an amateur musician. Nevertheless, Steve had not noticed much of any hearing loss problems until his wife and children started to complain that he was speaking too loudly and also had the TV turned up too high. He then began to notice some difficulty in hearing family and friends during noisy restaurant events and when riding in moving vehicles.

Eventually, Steve decided to ask his primary care physician at Sutter Health about a possible hearing loss, at which time she made a referral for Steve to see an audiologist. The audiologist gave Steve a hearing exam and gave him a written report and graphs of his hearing exam results. Steve described his hearing test results by directly quoting from his audiologist's report, along with the associated graphs, as follows:

**A Search for Hearing Loss Help:** "Pure Tone Testing indicated normal to slight hearing loss through 1.5 Hz sloping to a severe sensorineural hearing loss from 2-8 kHz bilaterally. \*Could not effectively mask right BC at kHz." By doing a little follow-up Internet checking on Wikipedia, Steve

discovered that telephone voice frequencies range from about 300 to 3,400 Hz, so his high frequency drop-off was within the upper range for speech. Relying on his audiogram graph from his audiologist, Steve further noted “The hearing loss in both ears over about 2k Hz seemed fairly clear from this graph and legend.”

Steve’s audiologist provided a copy of his audiogram in PDF format, as well as a list of recommended local hearing aid providers to whom he could take his audiogram. After checking the websites for local traditional hearing aid providers, Steve found that most of their products were relatively expensive (>\$6k). Yet, his health care insurance confirmed that he had no hearing aid coverage. However, this did not stop or deter Steve from proceeding with his plan to conduct some personal research on the availability of less expensive OTC hearing aids.

***The FDA’s Guidelines and Advice on OTC Hearing Aids:*** Based on his research, Steve shared what seemed to be important caveats and advice provided by the FDA about OTC HA’s. Steve referred us to the official FDA website on OTC Hearing Aids, as follows: <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/hearing-aids/otc-hearing-aids-what-you-should-know>.

- According to the FDA guidelines, “OTC hearing aids are intended only for perceived mild to moderate hearing loss, and NOT for the treatment of severe or profound hearing loss.”
- They are for “Adults 18 years of age and older.”
- “If you, or a friend, or family member suspect that you have a more severe or profound hearing loss, you should consult with a licensed hearing health care professional, as OTC hearing aids may not provide adequate benefit for more severe hearing losses.”
- The FDA gives some examples for when to seek professional help: “You can’t hear speech even if the room is quiet.”; “You don’t hear loud sounds well; you don’t hear loud music, power tools, engines, or other very noisy things.”

***Some Key FDA Warnings:*** The FDA goes further in providing some noteworthy warnings to persons who may be considering the purchase of OTC HA’s:

- ✓ Be sure you are buying a legitimate OTC hearing aid by checking that “the words ‘OTC’ and ‘hearing aid’ are prominently displayed on the packaging.”
- ✓ Take note that “statements such as ‘FDA Registered’ and ‘FDA Certified’ medical devices, and the use of a FDA logo on an OTC hearing aid package labeling may be misleading.”
- ✓ Avoid confusing prescription or OTC hearing aids with Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAP). In fact, the FDA warns that “PSAPs are often used when hunting, bird watching, listening to lectures with a distant speaker and listening to soft sounds that may be difficult for normal hearing individuals to hear . . . Unlike hearing aids, PSAPs are not intended to aid with or compensate for hearing impairment.”

***FDA “Red Flag” Conditions for when to See A Doctor, Preferably An ENT:*** Here are some examples:

1. Your ear has a birth defect or an unusual shape. Your ear was injured or deformed in an accident.
2. You saw blood, pus, or fluid coming out of your ear in the past 6 months.
3. Your ear feels painful or uncomfortable.
4. You have a lot of ear wax, or you think something could be in your ear.
5. You get really dizzy or have a feeling of spinning or swaying (called vertigo).
6. Your hearing changed suddenly in the past 6 months.

7. Your hearing changes; it gets worse, and then gets better again.
8. You have worse hearing in one ear.
9. You hear ringing or buzzing in only one ear.

**Additional Research & Resources on OTC Hearing Aids:** As Steve began his OTC hearing aid journey, he recalled an earlier HLAA email, as well as some Consumer Reports articles on hearing aids. He first read their more general hearing aid overview article on-line at: <https://www.consumerreports.org/health/hearing-aids/>. He then read a Consumer Reports OTC HA's specific article at: <https://www.consumerreports.org/hearing-aids/best-over-the-counter-hearing-aids-review-a7906529120/>. He then searched through the manufacturers identified by Consumer Reports to determine which ones had products that could be programmed to match his own PDF formatted audiogram sent by his audiologist.

**HLAA's Checklist for Shopping or Purchasing OTC Hearing Aids:** As Steve progressed in his OTC hearing aid journey, he reviewed the items on the checklist that HLAA provides on their website, which can be found at the following address: <https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/otc-hearing-aids/otc-shopping-checklist/>

Then referring to a 12/8/2023 Consumer Reports article, Steve presented their summary of OTC hearing types, as follows: "There are two main types: preset, which come with built-in configurations you choose from or, in some cases, only volume control; and self-fitting, which are more customizable and may provide better results in a variety of settings, but tend to cost more and may be more complicated to use." Consumer Reports also stated, "Among the makers of OTC hearing aids are companies like Sony and Jabra, with a long history of making headphones and speakers as well as newer, hearing-aid-focused companies such as Eargo and Lexie Hearing." Steve also presented the Consumer Reports ratings of traditional/OTC hearing aid brands with the top rated scores.

**Searching for OTC Hearing Aids:** As Steve continued his search journey for hearing aids that would best match up with his hearing loss situation. he went back to Consumer Reports and reviewed ratings of both traditional and OTC hearing aids for those brands with the top rated scores, which included Jabra products. Steve then began to focus in on Jabra products since he was familiar with their products from his use of their headsets and headphones at work and home.

Steve further explained that since he had used a Jabra headset in the past and the Consumer Reports ratings for prescription hearing aids looked good, he moved ahead to check out Jabra's website for OTC products, which can be found at: <https://www.jabra.com/hearing>. Jabra's website listed 3 models ranging from about \$1k-\$2k, and ranging from standard size to micro-size, with increasing levels of Bluetooth & iPhone support.

Steve noticed that the Jabra website said that consumers could take an on-line hearing test or upload an audiogram. Steve went ahead and uploaded the audiogram in PDF format from his audiologist and asked for a licensed audiologist to review it. After a couple days, a Jabra salesperson contacted Steve, telling him that their high-end (\$2k) hearing aid "Enhance Select 500" was compatible and recommended for his audiogram, while offering \$150.off. Jabra also documented a 100-day money-back return policy and 3 years of support.

**Purchasing OTC Hearing Aids:** After conducting his hands-on research on Jabra OTC hearing aids and talking to the Jabra salesperson, Steve weighed the low risk of purchasing OTC-HA's from a company from which he was already familiar and had good ratings from Consumer Reports. Steve proceeded in placing an order for Jabra's high end hearing aid "Enhance Select 500". The Jabra hearing

aids, which were programmed by Jabra, arrived within a week in August 2024, along with a USB charger/case and a variety of supplies including different sizes of earbuds (domes).

Steve installed the application on his iPhone SE, and the HA's seemed to work as expected. A week after Steve had started using the HA's, he had his first Zoom meeting with a Jabra customer service representative who was familiar with the product and had a BC-HIS certification.

**Pros & Cons Summary Based on Personal Experience in Purchasing OTC HA's:** After buying Jabra OTC HA's a short time ago, Steve was willing to comment on his personal experience so far with his new OTC hearing aids.

- Although Steve said he was initially surprised at the sound and loudness of his own voice, he has now gotten used to it and his wife no longer complains about him speaking too loudly.
- He hasn't been turning up the TV so high when wearing his hearing aids.
- It's been easier for him to hear friends & family in noisy restaurants.
- He attended a Broadway musical in Oakland while setting his HA's to "music" mode, and he found it a bit easier to understand lyrics, but still couldn't understand most of them.
- Steve said he has had some continuing right ear discomfort that got worse while wearing the hearing aids and was later diagnosed with an acute medical problem for which he is taking medications.
- Upon request, Steve was provided information about long-term support for purchasers of OTC HA's.
- Steve noted that the small size of the OTC HA's that he purchased, as well as the close integration with cell phones such as the iPhone, might make the model of the OTC HA's he chose less appropriate for some users.
- While OTC HA's might be an option for some persons with mild to moderate hearing loss, they may not be appropriate for individuals with more severe or profound hearing loss.

**Wrap-Up:** In wrapping up, our guest speaker Steve Luzmoor suggested that anyone who was interested in learning more about OTC hearing aids might consider starting with some of the resources that he had mentioned earlier, including the FDA, Consumer Reports, and HLAA websites. Researching the reviews of brand ratings of OTC HA's from these 3 sources, along with a couple of other identified online publications, added to his confidence that he made a good choice in selecting his new OTC hearing aids that fit well into his personal situation.

Finally, Steve reminded everyone that he was merely describing his own personal experience in researching and purchasing OTC hearing aids, but was not a hearing loss expert or professional and had no intention of recommending or endorsing any hearing loss treatment or product. Likewise, the HLAA-EB Chapter leaders made it clear that they too were not recommending or endorsing any particular hearing loss service or product that may have been mentioned during the current presentation, discussion or follow-up Q & A session.

**For More Information and/or Questions: Email: [info@hearinglosseb.org](mailto:info@hearinglosseb.org)**

**~ Kathy Fairbanks**

**We need your help! Can you volunteer? Contact us at: [info@hearinglosseb.org](mailto:info@hearinglosseb.org)**

Here is a list of volunteer positions we are seeking to fill:

- **Zoom Assistant** - Assist George Chin, Sr. to run Zoom, cameras, and PA/Audio Loop during in person/hybrid meetings.
- **Camera Operator** - Use a remote control to operate our 2 cameras for in-person Zoom meetings.
- **Volunteer Coordinator**: Contact people who said they could volunteer and tell them about volunteer needs. Recruit for those positions.
- **Outreach Coordinator**: Organize a table for our chapter at various street fairs and other venues. Set up the table. Recruit volunteers to help with the events. Reach out to people who participate in our meetings. Let people know about our chapter.
- **Just want to help?** All of our committees need helpers! All volunteers are welcome! Contact us and we'll help you figure out what would be a good fit for you.

### ***HLAA SF/East Bay Leaders***

Our Steering Committee, Leader: Len Bridges, [lenbridges3993-hlaa@outlook.com](mailto:lenbridges3993-hlaa@outlook.com)  
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### ***JOIN HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (HLAA) – THEY ADVOCATE FOR YOU!***

[hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org) Membership is now open to all of our valued supporters who help fuel our mission and change the lives of people with hearing loss. **Everyone who gives is now an HLAA member, helping to amplify our HLAA voice, and fulfill our important mission— together!**

**COST OF MEMBERSHIP:** The HLAA national office had consolidated the donation and membership processes. Presently, anyone who donates as little as \$1 would become a member of the national HLAA. Additionally, with a donation of \$45 annually, individuals have the option to receive a hard copy of the Hearing Life magazine from the national office.