

FREE TIME
FYI**Hello? Hello?**

In the United States today, telephones are an important part of people's lives. But there are lots of choices to make before you can pick up your own phone and say "Hello."

Local Calls: The first choice you have to make is about using a regular or a cellular phone for your local calls. Regular phone service from the local telephone company is cheaper — for a home phone it costs about \$20 a month in most cities. With this service you can make all the local calls you want.

If you prefer to use a cellular phone for your local calls, you will pay more. This is because charges for cell phones are based on the amount of time the phone is used. You pay both to make and to get a call. With a cellular phone, the same \$20 a month may only get you 30 minutes of telephone service. After those 30 minutes you pay a charge for each extra minute. Of course, a cellular phone can be much more convenient, especially for someone like a doctor or a person who isn't home much but needs to get important calls.

Personalized Services: After you have thought about which kind of phone you want to use, you can choose the special services you want. There are many options, but one of the most popular ones is *call waiting*, where if someone calls you while you are talking on the phone, you can answer the new call while the first person waits. There are other options too, and you pay a small extra monthly charge for each one you choose.

Long Distance: The last thing you need to think about is which long distance phone company you want to use. There are more than ten companies, including several large ones in the United States — *Sprint, MCI and AT&T* — and with each, you can choose different kinds of plans. Sometimes charges are the same all day long, and sometimes there are different charges for calls made at different times of the day. With some, the charges per minute go down the more long-distance calls you make.

Even after all these choices, you may still have trouble using the phone. Like a friend told me: "We have *call waiting* at our house. When my husband and I want to make a call, we first have to wait for our 15-year-old daughter to get off the phone!"

Bye!