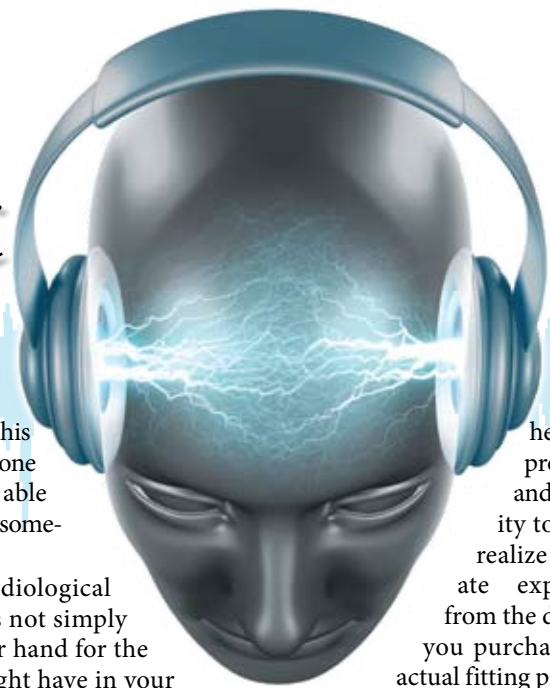


Hearing Better: A Process Not An Event

~BY DR. MARY MADDOCK AU.D.~



We “hear” with our ears but we “listen” with our brain. Understanding others requires that our ears gather information in the environment, efficiently transmit that information to the brain and effectively interpret what is said. A breakdown can occur in any one or combination of these locations. A hearing disability can be very mild or very severe. In any case, when you know and understand your hearing you can take steps to improve your communication abilities.

Should I have a Comprehensive Audiological Evaluation?

- ___ Have you been exposed to noise such as gunfire, power tools, loud music or any other noise that is loud enough to make normal conversation difficult?
- ___ Do you believe that other people mumble or speak to quickly?
- ___ Do you turn the TV up louder than your family prefers?
- ___ Do you ask people to repeat or say “huh” frequently?
- ___ Do your family members or friends make comments about your hearing?
- ___ Do you respond to questions inappropriately.
- ___ If you are over the age of 50, has it been more than a year since your last hearing test?
- ___ Do you have sounds in your ears such as ringing, buzzing, humming, etc??
- ___ Do you “hear” others but not understand what they are saying?
- ___ Do you have difficulty hearing in an auditorium when a PA system is being used?

Answering “yes” to any of these questions indicates a need for a thorough hearing test or comprehensive audiological

evaluation. Most importantly it is important to establish a baseline for your hearing and to initiate the appropriate communication strategies. Some types of hearing loss are medically treatable and some are not. Those that are not may or may not be helped with amplification. The majority of hearing loss in adults is not medically treatable and can be helped with amplification. The opposite is true for children.

Communication Strategies:

Understanding your hearing loss is critical to accepting the type of communication difficulties that you may have as a result of that hearing loss. For example, having a “high frequency” hearing loss will not cause the same communication difficulties as a “mild” hearing loss. Once you understand the hearing loss and the limitations it may place on your communication you can put into place the appropriate strategies to enable you to use your residual hearing and lessen the effects of the emotional component that is part of the communication difficulties that you may currently experience.

Take Action:

If you are found to have any type of hearing problem – Take Action. Listen to the advice of your hearing care professional. Research now suggests that there can be changes in the way in which your brain processes sound when it has been deprived of that sound. Therefore, providing stimulation may be important to preserving your auditory potential. The old adage of “use it or lose it” appears to be true for our brain’s ability to effectively use sound.

Securing Better Hearing:

Improving your hearing requires several steps. The first and most important component is the person who will be provid-

ing those services. This person must be someone with whom you are able to communicate and someone that you trust.

STEP 1: The Audiological Evaluation: This is not simply a test of “Raise your hand for the beeps” that you might have in your primary care doctors office. It also determines how well you understand speech in both quiet and noisy settings, how well various structures in your ear function and how well you use your other senses to understand the spoken message.

STEP 2: Hearing Counseling: This is the process of relating your audiological evaluation (hearing test) to your life communication settings. It is important that there is an understanding of how we react emotionally when we are not able to hear and also how our emotions affect our ability to process what we hear.

STEP 3: The Hearing Aid: This is the actual device that you may or may not purchase to help your hearing. Your hearing care professional should provide you with information regarding the types of hearing aids available and the choices in technology. There is not just one hearing aid for your hearing loss. There are many choices, however some choices are better for you. This is based more on your life style than your actual hearing loss. Therefore, skipping step two above will likely lead you to the wrong hearing aid purchase.

STEP 4: The Fitting Process: This is not a one time event, it is a process. The fitting of amplification with today’s technology will take place over several visits. Setting the hearing aid to your hearing loss and making appropriate fine tuning changes will depend on your ability to provide accurate information to your hearing

healthcare professional and their ability to help you realize appropriate expectations from the device that you purchased. The actual fitting process can take up to one year.

STEP 5: The Follow-up Counseling and Care: This is the care and information that your hearing health care provider disseminates to you on a long term basis. Your hearing may change over time or your life style may change. In either case, your hearing health care provider should know about those changes and provide you with update information regarding how communicate best.

Too many people think that purchasing a hearing aid is like purchasing a car or TV. The purchase of a hearing aid includes not only the instrument but the professional services to lead you to the greatest success with the device and the ability to hear and understand to your best potential. Cost of hearing aids may range from \$600 to \$3000 depending on the sophistication of the device that you purchase, the services provided to you and the warranty that the device carries. Be careful to not purchase features and services that you will not need or use.



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