



THE HEARING CLINIC

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Newsletter Spring 2013

Revisiting some old Favourites

We're often asked to cover topics in our newsletters already dealt with in previous issues. So although back issues are all available on our website we've decided to revisit some old favourites.

Tips on Speech and Hearing featured in our first newsletter in 2002 eventually became the bookmark included here. We are yet to meet a patient who doesn't benefit from handing it out!

Binaural hearing. Nature gives us two ears and they work best when used together. Years of research have shown that people with bilateral hearing loss benefit most from binaural amplification. Sound is more balanced and natural. In complicated listening situations one aid may be more distracting than helpful. What can one expect from two aids? Improved localisation of sound – both distance and direction, improved speech understanding in noise, improved sound sensitivity and nowadays, with ear-to-ear technology, the hearing aids work as a pair. This means that while one hearing aid is happily doing its thing, the other aid is no longer on its own mission. They are a team and communicate their settings and adjustments to each other, making for more balanced sound perception.

Auditory Deprivation. Although the biggest concern with hearing loss is that one loses confidence, quality of life and generally misses out on conversation, it also affects the brain's ability to remember common, everyday sounds because the natural hearing channels are no longer effectively used. When the hearing nerves lose their functionality and no longer channel sound signals to the brain, the brain "forgets" the sound over time and becomes unable to understand them. The auditory centre stores sounds for up to seven years following the onset of a hearing loss. But after that one's auditory memory becomes weaker and sounds can become unrecognisable. Once you wear a hearing aid the hearing processing resumes supplying signals to the brain, and in time it "remembers" and restores the auditory memories that might have been lost. The longer you wait, the bigger the effects of deprivation become. The more you stimulate, the faster the connections are made and maintained.

We did fun article on **Hearing Aid Mileage** where we worked out that if a hearing aid was worn for 10 to 12 hours per day or about 4000 hours per year, it would be equivalent to traveling 260 000 km a year by car. The car would have to be serviced once a month! Now consider that the tiny hearing aids need to run consistently and reliably through wind and weather, wax and perspiration, occasional laundry or the dog, whilst getting dropped, covered in hair spray and make-up, yet we still expect it to keep going. So the point was, look after them, keep them safe and understand that they will need repair and replacement.

A favourite was an article based on a letter Beethoven wrote to his brothers explaining the **Impact of Hearing Loss** on his quality of life. The isolation, the sadness, the passivity, and the stigma that had haunted him. Fortunately, for most hearing impaired people, things are much better today. An array of devices offer the hope of hearing and understanding again. However, we need to consider hearing loss as more than just the loss of a sense. We need to blend the use of sensory aids with the emotional, cognitive, social and often spiritual losses that hold those with hearing problems back from experiencing a fuller life. Fortunately, there are now services available which aim to address the stigma, the misunderstanding and the emotional load that comes with having a hearing loss.

Some topics are hardly worth covering these days, like **Feedback and Occlusion**. A few years ago feedback, the annoying whistle that you get from hearing aids, was a real concern. Today hearing aids have features which allow us to manage this whilst the processing power of the instruments allow them to be more stable. We still have whistles, but they usually occur only when the hearing aids are handled, not inserted correctly or when there's an obstruction in the ear.

Occlusion is the sensation of having a bucket over your head when wearing hearing aids. With open fitting hearing aids, paired with feedback management, better ventilation of the ear is possible and the build-up of excessive sound pressure is avoided. Here and there we struggle with some occlusion when we have tricky ear canals, but for the most, it's a thing of the past. Viva La Technologie!

Tinnitus

Tinnitus is a ringing, hissing, buzzing or roaring sound in the ears or head. It can range from a minor annoyance to a debilitating condition and can result in sleep disorders, depression or anxiety. Its cause can be obvious or a complete mystery and this uncertainty is what makes it scary. The fact is that everyone experiences Tinnitus at some point or another in their lives. What makes it stay is what frightens us.

There is a lot of misinformation given on Tinnitus, often using scary words such as permanent, untreatable and incurable. But depending on the cause, the severity and the treatment, Tinnitus is most often manageable. Unless the cause is medical or medicinal, there are no miracle treatments so please don't buy over-the-counter cures.

Tinnitus therapy focusses on minimising the effect of the tinnitus and include:

- ✓ Lifestyle changes which may include diet changes, avoiding stimulants such as caffeine, reducing anxiety and stress, stop smoking or drinking alcohol and increasing daily exercise.
- ✓ Hearing Loss is the most common cause of tinnitus, so treating the one, often treats the other. Using hearing aids long term helps most and there are hearing aids with built-in noise makers to make the transition easier.
- ✓ Tinnitus Retraining Therapy focusses on the brain's ability to get used to things we train it to get used to. Like living next to a railway line, you can get used to anything, but with the right guidance.
- ✓ Relaxation Training. Often one's reaction and response to situations may cause the tinnitus to set in or increase in volume and intensity. Relaxation training teaches you to manage your emotional charge.
- ✓ Biofeedback and cognitive behavioural therapy involves using your brain and your body to control itself.

All of this work takes knowledge, experience and dedication which is why not many audiologists go there. Luckily Beth has a passion for it. For help or advice, please contact us and we will book you to see Beth for a Tinnitus consultation.

Know your Rights to Access Information and Communication

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities and South African legislation clearly indicate that all persons with hearing loss must be able to exercise their right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others. Information intended for the general public **MUST** be provided to persons with hearing loss in accessible formats and technologies. Augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication should be available to persons with hearing loss. For support and advice on the impact of hearing loss in your home and working environment, have a look at our website and click on the page Road to Independence for information regarding the following:



- ∞ Disability grants
- ∞ Sensitization around hearing loss
- ∞ Human Rights
- ∞ Emotional Support
- ∞ Access assessments of buildings & services & products
- ∞ Tax deductions – disability expenses

South African
Hearing Institute

In the Practice



It's been another exciting & productive year at The Hearing Clinic. We have yet another baby boy to show off, Celeste's Ethan, and we are thrilled to have her back at all her normal spots and times. It looks like we will actually have a baby-free 2014, so all round cheers to our first full staff count since 2008!

We have joined forces with the South African Hearing Institute (www.sahi.org.za), an NGO which was established to promote the design of products, services, knowledge and environments to be accessible by and to all persons with hearing loss, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for personal adaptation or special provision. Their vision is to fully support persons with hearing loss in terms of their respective and unique needs. We are now a resource for SA Hearing (www.sahearing.co.za), a web based database of hearing aid accessories, assistive listening & living devices and hearing protection. We have helped create this project and are constantly updating the ever evolving database. Products can be viewed and enquired about and even purchased. Please have a look and let us know what you think. Francis made a turn in Hong Kong to learn more about the new hearing aid technology out there and was amazed! 2014 promises to be nothing short of phenomenal so feel free to ask us about what is out there at the moment.

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