

Hearing Aids Stimulate the Brain

How long have you been aware that you aren't hearing as well as you used to? Most people wait between 7 – 10 years before they do anything about their hearing loss. It's not usually something that you suddenly notice one morning when you wake up. Age-related hearing loss is a gradual process and is often only noticed after it has been going on long enough to start causing frustration.

Apart from the obvious complications that come with hearing loss – decreased speech understanding, impaired hearing in noise – it also interferes with the brain's memory of speech and other common sounds in our listening environments. This happens because the hearing nerve receives less stimulation and gets 'rusty' or 'unfit'. This means that the brain receives less sound and begins to 'forget' sounds that it is not hearing over time. The brain's auditory memory can only actively store sound memories for 7 years. After that, it has to be re-introduced to certain sounds.

This means that even when we wear appropriate amplification, if a hearing loss has been present for the average 7 years, the brain has already begun to forget certain sounds or pitches. This means that it would have to relearn these sounds again – a possible, but potentially laborious process. It is normal for these forgotten sounds to sound like noise in the beginning. Give it time for the brain to relearn what these sounds are. They will no longer be bothersome then.

This is why it is so important to manage hearing loss appropriately (including amplification) as soon as possible. Remember, getting hearing aids and keeping them in the drawer, or only wearing them when in company, does not count! Wearing the hearing aids at home when it is quiet (even if there is nobody to talk to) allows the brain to practice with sounds most common to your environment first. It learns again how to filter relevant from irrelevant sounds.

Remember that if you are battling to get used to the strange sounds around you, you can talk to your audiologist who may be able to give you some tips.

Copy Right: Francis Slabber & Associates 2017