

# FRANCIS SLABBER, JANET STEER & ASSOCIATES

PROFESSIONAL CARE FOR ALL YOUR HEARING PROBLEMS

## THE HEARING CLINIC

35 WATERLOO RD

WYNBERG, 7800

Tel: 021 - 797 7948 / Tel: 021 - 715 5623

## TOKAI VILLAGE

VANS ROAD

## VALYLAND CENTRE

FISH HOEK

KENILWORTH MEDICROSS

ROSMEAD AVE



## Newsletter Autumn 2008

### No 2 & 3 in our Series

In our last newsletter, we explained that there are many reasons why some people do better with hearing aids than others and that many of the causes for not doing well, are easily solved. Many other issues are not that easily solved, mostly because they relate to things we can't control. We've started a series of newsletters to address these topics. Last time we spoke about reasons why a hearing aid might simply not be functioning. If you'd like a copy of that newsletter please give us a call and we'll send you one. The topics for this issue are "**Why do I feel blocked up with the aid in my ear?**" and "**But it's uncomfortable!**"

### Feeling Blocked-Up

Let's get the most obvious out of the way: Wax. The amplified sound from the hearing aid could be bouncing off the wax in the ear and cause either a whistle in the aid or a "cotton wool" feeling in the ear. If your hearing aid used to sound fine, and then started sounding blocked, muffled or dull, first have your ear checked for wax. If there is no wax in the ear, we'll have to check the hearing aid for a wax blockage. Alternatively you may be experiencing the occlusion effect.

Try sticking your fingers in your ears while chewing on something crunchy – then speak and you will experience the phenomenon known as occlusion. It's the closure effect you get when plugging your ears - with fingers, plugs or hearing aids. Sounds generated within the body (for example speech or chewing) reach the ear through the vibration of the skull bones and not only through air via the ear canal. Usually, these sound waves can escape through the open ear canal, so that they're not noticed. If the canal is blocked, additional sound pressure is generated in the closed canal and transmitted through the middle ear to the inner ear. The effect is like speaking into a barrel, with a hollow or booming quality and considerably louder.

Earmoulds and hearing aids block the ear canal to a greater or lesser extent depending on the anatomy of the ear canal, materials used, the depth of insertion, venting and the combination of all these. Individual ear canals are very different in shape, which implies that there might even be differences in occlusion of one's own two ears.

Venting the mould or hearing aid can decrease the problem acting like a mini-air-conditioning system for optimum air circulation inside the ear canal. Unfortunately vents can also cause feedback (whistling) and can even compromise the hearing. One could also try to alter the shell slightly to fit deeper into the ear canal or touch less of the bony portion of the ear, but the same limitations apply. Re-shelling or even sizing up to a bigger mould or model might be necessary.

In the last few years, this problem has been dealt with very successfully by fitting open-ear hearing aids. They work on the principal of not blocking the ear canal at all and thereby allowing lots of air to flow in and out of the ear cavity. It works extremely well in cases of high frequency hearing loss, most common in age related losses, but is less successful when a person has a more severe hearing loss. In such a case greater amplification is necessary and an open ear fitting will not be able to give enough of that. We have found that more occlusion occurs with in-the-ear fittings than with behind-the-ear fittings, simply because we can modify a mould or open-fitting much more than we can an aid that is custom made. You would also have more occlusion if you are wearing two aids, but then the benefit of binaural hearing outweighs the disadvantage of hearing your own voice.

Occlusion is mostly dealt with within the first few months of wearing new hearing aids. Consistent wearing helps with getting used to the feeling of hearing one's own voice, but sometimes this process of adaptation can take a bit longer. The mind needs time and opportunity to shape itself around it's new hearing world.

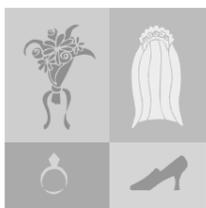
*Please check the replacement value of your hearing aids annually and specify them on your insurance!*

### My Hearing Aid Is Uncomfortable To Wear

If you are not using your hearing aid because it's uncomfortable in your ear, it is important that you come back to us and explain the discomfort.

- ☞ Again, the most obvious reason for discomfort is wax in the ear canal. Make sure that there is no hard wax in the ear that is pushing up against the hearing aid or mould.
- ☞ How old is your hearing aid? Your ear canal is cartilaginous bone which is ever changing. It stretches over time causing the hearing aid to shift and slide out of the ear, or causing a pressure point to form in the canal. We can remedy this by filing down the aid/mould or by re-shelling the aid/fitting a new mould. We find that aids fit well in the first 3 years, but after that the fit is affected by the changing ear canal.
- ☞ If you have lost or gained weight after the original hearing aid/mould was manufactured you will also find changes occurring in the width of the ear canal, making the hearing aid or mould uncomfortable to wear. If the aid is not fitting properly, you will also be compromising the quality of the sound that is produced by the hearing aid. If it's too loose, more sound will escape the ear and you'll have less amplification and more whistling, if it's too tight, you'll have discomfort.
- ☞ Physical issues such as unstable ear canals, recurrent middle ear conditions, surfer's ear which causes bony bumps to grow in the ear canals or even little pimples in the canals, will cause discomfort. Some of it will be temporary and then it's best to wait before adjusting the hearing aid fit, and other times it will be a permanent situation which prompts us to go back to the drawing board with regard the choice of hearing aid. You could have very shallow blood vessels in the canal making it super-sensitive to touch, or you may have a prominent jaw joint which pushes into the hearing aid when you eat or speak.

Most importantly though, you have to remember that we can only address these issues if we know that they exist. If you have discomfort issues, be very clear as to where the pain or discomfort is coming from so that we can pinpoint the exact spot and make alterations as needed.



### Other Exciting News

*NADINE IS GETTING MARRIED! WE ARE THRILLED TO REPORT THAT NADINE HAD A BOXING DAY ENGAGEMENT AND WILL BE TYING THE KNOT IN SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR. YOU WILL PROBABLY NOTICE THE SPARKLE IN HER EYE AS WELL AS ON HER FINGER!*

In January 2008 we were joined by **Elisha Berridge**, a qualified audiologist who has been practicing in Cape Town for the past 7 years. She has been a great addition to the practice and is kept busy by many of her loyal clients who've followed her here. Elisha has been attending to our Kenilworth rooms on Monday mornings and spends the rest of her week in Wynberg. Not only does she run the Comrades, she also goes about her business in an extremely professional and knowledgeable manner. We have welcomed her with open arms and hope you do the same. *Remember: Our Kenilworth rooms are open **Monday** morning from 9h00 to 12h00. For appointments, please phone 021 – 797 7948.*

Since February 2008, **Nadine Jooste** has been going to Fish Hoek on Wednesdays as well as Fridays. We've noticed a growing demand for qualified and experienced attendance in Fish Hoek and surrounds and thought it best to make her available more often. On other days you'll find her in Wynberg. We have just had a landline installed in Fish Hoek, so you are welcome to phone us there on 021 – 782 3322.

*Remember: Our Fish Hoek rooms are open **Wednesday & Friday** from 9h00 to 16h00. To make an appointment, please call 021 – 782 3322 or 021 – 715 5623.*

**Francis Slabber** still goes to Tokai every **Tuesday** and **Thursday** and we'd like to encourage you to visit her there if you can't get an appointment in Wynberg on Monday, Wednesday or Friday.

*Remember: Our Tokai rooms are open **Tuesday & Thursday** from 8h30 to 16h30. For appointments please call 021 – 715 5623 or our cell phone 073 731 6222.*

The Wynberg rooms remain our head office and you can call there for advice or appointments any day of the week between 8h30 and 17h00. Our number is 021 – 797 7948. They will point you in the right direction.

**Francis Slabber   &   Janet Steer   &   Nadine Jooste   &   Elisha Berridge**  
**Audiologist                      Acoustician                      Audiologist                      Audiologist**