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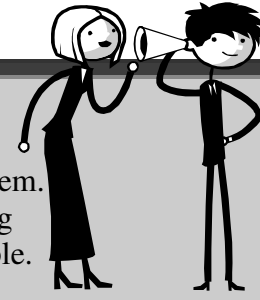
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Newsletter Spring 2008



Listening to Speech in Noise

In a study done to test hearing aid use, 16% of those with hearing aids never wore them. Of that, 25% felt that it was because the hearing aids didn't work in difficult listening situations, they amplified loud noises too much or background noise was unacceptable.

We have to understand how listening really happens. Within the inner ear, there are 4 rows of hair cells – 3 rows of outer cells for hearing soft sounds and picking up speech in background noise, and 1 row of inner cells for managing loud sounds and stimulating the nerve whose job it is to get the signal to the brain. In most cases of hearing loss, predominantly that caused by aging, the outer hair cells are damaged and therefore the most common complaint is that people can't hear soft speech in back-ground noise. Should the inner hair cells be damaged, the signal would not be sent down to the nerve and should the nerve be damaged, it will not reach the brain at all, or worse, reach it in bits and pieces that don't make any sense. And then we get to the "real ear"; **The Brain**. In combination all these structures are referred to as the Auditory System and in most cases, one would actually have a degree of loss of the Auditory System rather just a loss of hearing in the ear.

We have found that in most cases people with limited damage to their Auditory Systems do well with hearing aids given the correct training that it takes to learn to listen with an artificial device in your ear. After all, we can never replace the real thing with an external, artificial, electronic device.

Just like we forget names, places or faces when we get older, the auditory system forgets and needs to be reminded and retrained. Complex sounds are more difficult to process, listen to and understand and hearing aids can only compensate for the loss of hearing, and not for the loss of listening ability.

Listening is not a decision, it's a skill which has to be perfected, and like all skills takes training and practice. If you have not heard properly in background noise for years, and expect to hear perfectly in background noise with a brand new hearing aid, you would probably feel that the aid is making the noise louder than the speech. That is because it is easier for your brain to recognise noise, than it is for it to decipher speech. Over the years, your brain has been training itself not to listen in background noise, now it has to jump back into action and remember what to do. If language is not heard and spoken, the brain forgets how to process it and reverts to the language it does know. If that language is noise, then that's the language it will look for and recognise first – especially when it's amplified.

The alternative is: Don't get old, never watch TV and lock yourself in a quiet room where you only speak to one person at a time who has been trained to speak loudly, slowly and clearly!

When you start noticing a loss of hearing, visit a professional audiologist, and before too much damage sets in, get a good set of hearing aids and make the most of what technology can offer. Follow this up with auditory rehabilitation training with your audiologist and then practice, practice, practice.

New Service

With reference to the article above, we have implemented an auditory rehabilitation training program which is computer based and together with your audiologist takes 10 weeks to complete. It aims to train you to maximise the use of your hearing aids right from the start. The type of hearing aid that you have is not important, nor is the type of hearing loss, but your active participation and willingness to learn is imperative. Due to the time it takes to complete the program, we charge R2950 for ten sessions, based on medical aid rates. Please contact us for more info.

Techno-Talk

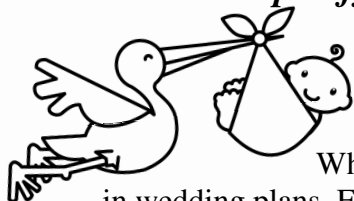
Technology is changing at a rapid pace and it's difficult to keep up with the developments, even for those in the industry. Wireless technology is the norm and Bluetooth capabilities are being built into hearing aids. What this means in plain English, is that hearing aids can now not only communicate with one another to coordinate their functions, but they can also be linked to devices such as your cell-phone, TV and sound system. This means that you can use the advanced abilities of the hearing aids to listen to and improve on the sound of less advanced devices. At the moment, technology is expensive, but there are simpler versions available and a multitude of other assistive devices that have been developed specifically for use with TV, Sound Systems and Telephones.

Another change in the market is that design is moving away from the "invisible" hearing aid to the "trendy" hearing system. Hearing aids are produced in a multitude of colours, some of which you can even change yourself to match your wardrobe. Some come with hand-held remote controls that enhance adjustability and some have rechargeable batteries. We are here to help you make the appropriate choice based on your likes and dislikes as well as your hearing abilities.

A new trend of "chain-store-selling" has hit the South African hearing aid market in the last few months. We have learnt through 20 years of practice that there is no such thing as an instant cure for hearing loss, and yet these outlets manage to sell the ideal rather than the reality to their customers. They are luring customers by promising freebies which is not the professional route. We would like to urge you to be careful and consider what is being offered against what is being delivered. There are no miracle cures for hearing loss, particularly in the case of an aging ear.

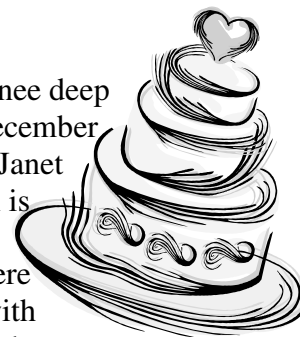
As registered audiologists we answer to the Health Professions Council of South Africa which safeguards patient rights and we're guided by strict ethical rules relating to our professional conduct, advertising and service delivery. These "chain-stores" are commercial enterprises whose operations are not restricted by HPCSA regulations so watch out for outlets which are driven by commercialism and not professionalism.

Please check the replacement value of your hearing aids annually and specify them on your all risks insurance for loss or damage!



Weddings, Babies and Other Changes

What a year it has been! Nadine got engaged and has been knee deep in wedding plans, Elisha announced that she was expecting a baby early in December and will be knee deep in who knows what for 3 months after and Francis and Janet are as always just knee deep. One upset has been that our lease at Kenilworth is expiring and we chose to find new premises to consult at. We are moving to Openways Surgery in Belvedere Rd, Claremont and are aiming at working there more often. The rooms will be part of a multi-disciplinary medical practice with easy access from Pinelands, Rondebosch, Newlands and Claremont. Our last day at Kenilworth MediCross will be 8 September and we are hoping to open in Claremont on 6 October.



From September, we will have a new morning receptionist at Wynberg and we have also found a fantastic locum audiologist to cover for Elisha from December to February, so any unfamiliar faces around the office will be one of them. During August and September we did a series of talks at many retirement villages in the area and have had a wonderful response to these.

As always we have attended masses of lectures and courses during the year and on-going new product workshops. This keeps us abreast with developments and ensures that we can offer new products as they become available. Please contact us if you'd like to know what is available.

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

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