



Newsletter Autumn 2011

Auditory Processing Disorder

APD is the new buzz word in education with particular focus on it's effect on children's learning abilities. However, little is known about APD in adults and how it impacts on successful listening and communication.

Listening disorders are more difficult to detect in adults because they're easily hidden in adult life. We nod and smile even if we don't understand what's said and make it out to be the fault of the noisy environment or the speaker. Most commonly APD is associated with slowly progressing hearing loss, but recent research has shown that it may accompany normal ageing and also occurs as a result of brain injury or conditions like Alzheimer's and Dementia.

We know that, as we age, we experience a decline in vision and hearing, as well as in other sensory and motor systems. We don't move as fast or speak as well and even lose some of our sense of taste and smell. Our brains just don't seem as sharp as they once did. Subtle changes in our bodies and minds occur as early as our thirties or forties. Ever noticed that you started hating loud noise or struggled to hear speech in noisy restaurants long before any hearing loss was suspected?

It would seem logical that if you can't hear, you can't listen. But what if you can hear but can't understand what you are hearing? Listening is just that – knowing what you are hearing. We use our ears to hear and our brains to listen. If the ear is impaired, a hearing aid often does the trick, but if the brain doesn't listen, you won't understand what you are hearing. "Forgetting" the art of listening is most often due to a progressive loss of hearing and lack of exposure to certain sounds, but it is also brought on by an ageing nervous system and brain.

How often haven't we heard: "They speak to me while walking away"; "The TV has terrible sound quality and people don't know how to speak anymore"; "People speak too fast nowadays". "I'm not that interested in what is being discussed anyway". A loss of hearing is often to blame for much of the difficulty, but sometimes there is an underlying listening disorder and once we've addressed the hearing problem, the challenge really starts. Hearing loss and APD are rarely isolated conditions but are certainly isolating for the one with the loss as well as their families and friends. There is frustration and anxiety caused on both sides.

Typical symptoms of APD include the inability to understand speech even when it is loud enough; difficulty in distinguishing different speakers, words and sounds against competing background noise; the inability to understand speech spoken in a foreign accent; difficulty in localizing sound and not being able to keep up with rapidly spoken conversations. Normal hearing aging adults often experience these symptoms too and it's disappointing when one finds out that a hearing aid can not solve all one's hearing problems instantly. It takes time, effort and patience to address listening issues appropriately.

Changes occur in the entire auditory system, from the ear to the brain, as a result of the aging process. Like the chicken and the egg, it may be impossible to separate all brain-related changes from ear-related changes and therefore treatment must be comprehensive with the support and participation of families and caregivers.

Because of the increase in aging populations and people becoming more health conscious, hearing is being tested at younger ages, hearing losses are diagnosed earlier and hearing aids are fitted at earlier stages. This to some extent may contribute to avoiding or at least postponing some of the APD symptoms associated with age.

Most exciting perhaps, is that research into brain plasticity and aging shows that through stimulation, we can improve the function – or slow the rate of degeneration – of the aging adult's brain. Just as physical exercise can improve function in the body, exercising the mind can help to keep it in shape too. In order to exercise the brain, we have to ensure that it gets the suitable stimulation which means using hearing aids and other assistive devices. Once the right quality of sound reaches the brain, we can start giving it a workout and as with any new exercise, it takes practice, patience and perseverance to get it right. And of course realistic expectations!



We're celebrating our 20th Birthday by running our Lend an Ear Project again. It was a great success last year and gave many people the opportunity to have their hearing tested at half the cost. You may use the voucher yourself, or pass it on to somebody else and it will entitle the bearer to 50% discount off the cost of a consultation and/or a hearing test. Your voucher is included here – remember to hand it in at reception when redeeming it. We've also included a Self-Assessment Tool which you can give to friends or family members you suspect might have a hearing problem.

When To Get A Hearing Test

The signs of hearing loss are often difficult to detect.
Ask yourself these questions to evaluate your hearing.

1. Do people seem to mumble or speak in a softer voice more than they used to? YES NO
2. Do you feel tired or irritable after a long conversation or being in noise? YES NO
3. Do you sometimes miss key words in a sentence? YES NO
4. Do you frequently need to ask people to repeat themselves? YES NO
5. Do you have difficulty understanding conversation in a crowded room? YES NO
6. Do you often turn the volume up on the TV or radio? YES NO
7. Does background noise bother you? YES NO
8. Is it sometimes hard to hear the conversation on the telephone? YES NO
9. Do you sometimes not hear the doorbell or telephone ring? YES NO
10. Are your family or friends complaining about your hearing? YES NO

If you answered **YES** to any of these questions, you may want to schedule a hearing test. Through testing, we can diagnose hearing loss as well as its nature and extent and an appropriate course of action will be recommended. This may include a referral to an ENT Specialist or advice on listening strategies, hearing aids and/or assistive listening devices.

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

TV Listeners

The Sennheiser TV Listeners mentioned in the last Newsletter have proven very popular and we'd like to invite you to pop in at the Wynberg or Tokai office to try out our demo set in the waiting room. These devices are specifically designed for people with hearing loss and can be used with or without hearing aids. They work wirelessly and relay the sound from the TV directly to either the earphones or the hearing aids and can be adjusted to suit you. They do not interfere with the normal sound of the TV, making it possible for others to watch TV at their preferred level while you hear comfortably too. Combinations sets are also available.

In the Practice



The Hearing Clinic will be two babies richer this year! Elisha has just had her second baby and Krysia will have her first in August. We are also proud to introduce Celeste Leveson, our new audiologist. Celeste hails from Natal and has a special interest in geriatrics and aural rehabilitation. We've had some uphill with the bank regarding their new charging policies, so we ask that, where possible, you settle accounts by Electronic Bank Transfer. Also, although Janet is no longer consulting, we will be keeping our name the same for the next two years.

<i>Wynberg</i>	<i>35 Waterloo Rd</i>	<i>Monday to Friday</i>	<i>8h30 - 17h00</i>	<i>021 - 797 7948</i>
<i>Tokai</i>	<i>Tokai Village</i>	<i>Tuesday & Thursday</i>	<i>8h30 - 16h30</i>	<i>021 - 715 5623</i>
<i>Claremont</i>	<i>19 Belvedere Rd</i>	<i>Monday & Wednesday</i>	<i>9h00 - 15h30</i>	<i>021 - 797 7948</i>
<i>Fish Hoek</i>	<i>Valyland Centre</i>	<i>Wednesday & Friday</i>	<i>8h30 - 16h30</i>	<i>021 - 782 3322</i>

FRANCIS SLABBER & NADINE JOOSTE & ELISHA BERRIDGE & CELESTE LEVESON