



## Newsletter Spring 2011

### Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

More often than not, we find that hearing aids do not assist the wearer equally in all situations and this may leave one a little disappointed and disillusioned. Maybe it is because most people have unrealistic expectations about what technology has to offer, or that deep down they were hoping to find a cure for their hearing difficulties. We know that hearing aids improve audibility but we also know that it's not always enough.

With 3D TV's, PVR's, iPads, Blackberries and Skype, our older population are expected to participate in life much more actively now than ever before. A hearing disability is no longer considered a justification to exclude oneself from conversation, interaction or social involvement. Life has become much noisier, yet we have to keep up and participate just as before. We are expected to go to movies and restaurants, attend lectures, watch plays and listen to music. There's bulletproof glass between the bank attendant and yourself and blaring music in every restaurant. We are required to keep up with not only our peers but also our children and grandchildren.

Staying informed and involved can be a tall order for those with hearing problems. Public places are now expected to be "Disability Friendly" but hearing impairment is mostly overlooked, leaving it to the hard-of-hearing person to cope on their own. Often, the hearing impairment is not the only challenge and there can be issues with mobility, vision and cognition.

Hearing instruments support the residual hearing, but they do not normalise it and, in many instances, one may actually want better than normal hearing to compensate for other issues. For example, if you have poor eyesight as well as a hearing problem and attend a lecture, you may not have the added benefit of being able to lip-read the speaker, so you rely on hearing every word. However with a hearing aid alone, you are probably not going to hear every word because the hearing aid relies on a clear sound signal, a good speaker and decent room acoustics. In a restaurant with friends, hearing aids must contend with all the background noise and speech generated around it. No matter how advanced or expensive the hearing aids, noise is still noisy. This is where Assistive Listening Devices become useful.

ALDs are devices that help you function better in your day-to-day communication situations. They can be used with or without hearing aids, thereby reducing listening stress and fatigue. There are various sorts, with a range of particular functions and they are meant to improve your listening abilities in situations such as:

- ✿ **Distance between the listener and the sound source.** The further away you are from a speaker, the harder it is to hear. Sound energy fades rapidly as it travels over distance, through air and past obstacles leaving you with only a portion of the original signal. Your hearing aid may be good for hearing someone in close range, but it may need assistance in helping you hear at a distance.
- ✿ **Competing noise in the environment.** There may be background noise that competes with the sound we want to hear, like others talking, computers, radios, TVs or traffic. Some hearing aids can try to manage the noise, but it wouldn't know what exactly you do want to hear in that cacophony of sound.
- ✿ **Poor room acoustics/reverberation.** Sound waves bounce off hard surfaces like windows, walls, and hard floors and will affect your ability to hear effectively. Reverberation / echo causes distorted speech.
- ✿ **Poor recordings/heavy accents.** We all know that TV programs are often more frustrating than entertaining because of the accents, the poor sound recording and sporadic variation in volume.

In all of these instances, we find that hearing aids fall a little short. Most people cope and just live with it, but for many others who are inspired to stay independent, keep participating, involved and contributing, there are ALD's available to ease the way. There are cell phone devices, landline attachments, TV accessories and mobile personal listeners which make hearing in challenging environments more controlled and more direct.

Units are also available to make it possible for you to hear your telephone ring better, the doorbell from down the passage, the alarm at night when you're not wearing the hearing aids or even amplified baby/granny monitors!

We have demonstration units available of some of the ALD's on the market and can assist you in finding the right one for your particular needs. Give us a call to enquire further or pop in at the Tokai rooms to see them.

**REMEMBER TO INSURE YOUR HEARING AIDS AGAINST LOSS OR DAMAGE**

## Auditory Rehabilitation

A few years ago we launched a new service, offering computer based training to help the brain hear and listen more effectively with hearing aids. We have now expanded the program to be even more accessible and appropriate to help those with hearing loss and hearing aids make the most of their instruments and ears.

Auditory or Aural Rehab, addresses to the fact that over time, as your hearing loss has set in and progressed, the brain and auditory nerve have lost some of their auditory abilities. These include:



**Auditory Memory:** The ability to retain and interpret verbally presented information. Problems will cause one to lose track of conversations and have difficulty recalling conversations or following instructions.



**Auditory Discrimination:** The ability to perceive similarities/differences between individual sounds, words and word pairs. Difficulties here would result in sound confusion, reliance on lip reading and regular misunderstanding or misinterpretation of speech.



**Auditory Analysis & Synthesis:** The ability to distinguish between parts of a whole sound/word/sentence and to combine those elements to form a meaningful whole. Complications here implies that one might "get stuck" on a word whilst trying to find its meaning or regularly misinterpret speech.



**Auditory Closure:** The ability to finish an incomplete sound/word/sentence by adding that which was left out. Particular difficulty in hearing speech in noise and not being able to "fill in the gaps" when some of the sounds/words/sentences were missed.



**Auditory Sequencing:** The ability to perceive and recall sounds, words or sentences in their correct temporal order. Difficulties in this area may result in difficulty following instructions, and sequencing letters/words for spelling and speech understanding.

All of these Auditory functions go hand-in-hand and one would seldom have difficulties with only one. We usually acquire these skills from infancy when we learn to interpret sounds and assign meaning to them. These skills are also quite easily lost as the hearing starts to decline. At first, it may be little things, like not hearing birds in the garden any more and later forgetting that you had once heard them at all. Eventually though, lack of stimulation to the nerve and auditory centre of the brain leads to more complex difficulties. When you are first fitted with hearing aids, the world seems a lot noisier than you may remember it being and it takes some brain-training to hear life in a more fulfilling and lifelike way.

These are not skills easily regained and it takes a fair amount of effort. Our Rehabilitation Program now includes listening strategies, speech-in-noise training, group therapy and more in depth one-on-one work.

Celeste Leveson is our Rehab Audiologist and will have a dedicated day per week for these sessions at our Tokai rooms. Anyone is welcome to make an appointment with her, whether you are not quite ready for hearing aids, have had hearing aids for years or have just taken the plunge. She will assess your abilities and difficulties to determine how much guidance you may need. You will be given some homework and may need either weekly sessions or be booked to see her less often depending on your individual needs.

Most Medical Aids pay in full for our consultations and each rehab session is charged individually. A typical session takes about an hour depending on your progress. If you require in-depth home programs, you might be charged for these as well. These sessions are time consuming and need preparation so will be by appointment only. Appointments not cancelled at least 48 hours in advance will be billed. Please phone Celeste at our Wynberg rooms for further enquiries – 021 797 7948.

## In the Practice



We're all back in action after the two new babies this year, so its all hands on deck. Some exciting news is that from November, we will have a fully stocked ALD demo display in Tokai and Barbara, our newest reception recruit, will be at the Valyland rooms every Monday through to Friday. Claremont has also had a slight change in office hours to accommodate motherhood, so to avoid a wasted trip, please phone ahead to confirm that we are there. Here are the details...

<u>Wynberg</u>	<u>Tokai</u>	<u>Claremont</u>	<u>Fish Hoek</u>
35 Waterloo Rd	Tokai Village	19 Belvedere Rd	Valyland Centre
Monday to Friday	Tues & Thurs	Mon & Wed	Mon, Wed & Fri
8h30 – 17h00	8h30 – 16h30	9h00 – 14h00	8h30 – 16h30
021 – 797 7948	021 – 715 5623	021 – 797 7948	Tues & Thurs till 15h00 021 – 782 3322

**Francis Slabber & Nadine Jooste & Elisha Berridge & Celeste Leveson**