

Hear & Now

Autumn 2019



Listening Effort

Last year we told you with great excitement about the World Audiology Conference that was being held in Cape Town; the first ever in Africa! As with all academic conferences, there is often research presented which is still very much in progress and as private practice audiologists we hope for tangible, take-home proven research and training which we can use and apply in consult. Research is very necessary in a profession as vast as ours, and the recent excitement over the first reconstructive middle-ear surgery using a 3D printed middle-ear is proof of that. South Africa is a leader in the field of Audiology and Otolaryngology and it is an honour to be part of the profession at the moment. However, when we're sitting face to face with our patients who are not surgical candidates, what we really want are real-life tools that we can give our patients to lighten the load of frustration caused by their hearing loss.

One topic repeatedly focused on during the conference was Listening Effort. Experts from all over the world were concentrating not on which technology is best for restoring hearing, but on which tools are best to reduce listening effort and the impact thereof on listening efficiency. Researchers are agreeing that the more effort required in the process of hearing and listening, the more mental and physical fatigue sets in.

Hearing and listening is not the same. Hearing is automatic, listening requires effort. For example: two people with similar hearing losses, listening to the same thing, may report varying degrees of listening effort needed to understand what they are hearing. These differences are due to how much effort it takes from an individual to process what they are hearing and what constitutes something to be difficult versus easy to understand.

For optimal understanding, listeners with hearing loss must allocate more cognitive resources, or brain power, to listening than normal hearing listeners. This increase in cognitive resources is referred to as listening effort. Our cognitive resources are not unlimited; using additional brain power to listen leaves fewer resources for other tasks. For example, to maintain optimal understanding in a challenging situation, one may need to shift more resources from other ongoing cognitive tasks such as short term memory. This means that the brain is working harder to follow conversation which would otherwise have been an easy task, leaving little energy for storing information or formulating responses. This can be an exhausting process for the listener.

A person with normal hearing does not usually experience this type of fatigue. They can listen effectively, formulate responses quickly and enjoy conversations more, even in challenging situations. When hearing loss is present, the brain must compensate for the loss and work harder than before to process the same information, causing stress on the brain. Fatigue leads to withdrawal, and evidence is growing that social isolation is a risk factor for dementia. Cognitive decline in older adults means that there is less cognitive resources available for complicated tasks. Understanding and interpreting speech requires functional and advanced cognitive resources.

Increased listening effort can lead to other significant consequences such as stress, tension and anxiety. People living with hearing loss use more mental energy and thus tire more easily. The amount of energy required for listening can interfere with the person's performance during simultaneous tasks. For example, they struggle to focus when listening to someone speaking to them while a TV is on in the background - not because the TV is too loud, but because the brain must actively filter the TV sound whilst deciphering the speech it's receiving. One may become disorientated and confused when there are multiple sound signals to process and interpret. Listening to desired speech in the presence of undesired speech becomes a daunting task for the hearing impaired brain.

We're praying for lots of rain this winter but remember to keep your hearing aids dry. Hearing aids build up internal condensation during the cold months causing corrosion and intermittency. Keep them dry by using Dry Capsules or an Electronic Drying Box. Purchase a Winter Care Kit for only R100 to help with moisture prevention.

How to Reduce Listening Fatigue?

Have your hearing professionally evaluated, diagnosed, and managed by a registered audiologist. Make sure that you understand the hearing loss and implications thereof.

Be sure that you are tested in an environment which meets diagnostic specification to ensure accurate results which will be used in all future management.

Use hearing aids which could reduce listening effort and susceptibility to mental fatigue. All hearing aids are not created equal and listening fatigue is an important symptom to mention when discussing amplification as it guides the audiologist in recommending appropriate management.

Use your hearing aids during all your waking hours, not just when you think you need them. Normal brains listen subconsciously all the time and thereby learn to filter irrelevant sounds from relevant sounds. By wearing hearing aids all the time, even in quiet, the brain is constantly learning how to filter appropriately.

Reduce the background noise or employ specific communication strategies to reduce the effects of background noise. These communication strategies can be learnt by yourself and your significant other during listening therapy sessions with your audiologist. We offer these, so please ask if you are interested.

Have quiet time during the day but keep your hearing aids in when doing so. If you need a break, take one and if you struggle to acclimatize to your hearing aids, discuss options with your Audiologists. There are ways and means in allowing the brain more time and space to acclimatize to amplification.

Charging for Services Rendered

It's now been over a year since we were first notified of new legislation issued by the Department of Health. We have tried our best to keep you informed and will continue to do so. Please be patient with us as we implement these new legalities.

As of 1 January 2018 we may not provide free services of any kind, including hearing aid repair and servicing, even for those still under warranty. The DoH now describes all free services as a form of unethical incentivising and we are obliged to charge for all in-house costs in handling, receiving and programming of products. We're keeping costs as low as possible but there is a service fee on all repairs. For hearing aids which are under warranty, we charge R150 per hearing aid serviced. For hearing aids that are out of warranty, we charge R250 over and above the charges levied by the suppliers. All costs will be itemized separately for complete transparency. All consultations, programming and testing must be charged for as well.

We continue to charge medical aid rates and should you have benefits available for audiology and hearing aids, we will submit directly to them on your behalf.

Moving On

It's with a very heavy heart that we say goodbye to Barbara Newman, our mother hen and rock of support in Fish Hoek. Barbara has become an integral part of our Work Family but as she steps bravely forth into the Land of Retirement after 8 years of loyal service, we wish her well and know that she will have a fantastic time catching up with her kids and grandkids. We're hoping that it's not farewell and that we will ask her to help out from time to time when help is needed.

We therefore introduce Lizel Burgher who will be taking over from Barbara in Fish Hoek at reception. Lizel comes to us with experience in reception, customer service and administrative assistance but her first love is community care, so she is perfectly suited for the job. We welcome her with open arms and look forward to a long and happy future together.

Francis Slabber

Elisha Berridge

Celeste Leveson

Beth Cockcroft

Sarah Buitendag

Wynberg

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Monday to Friday

8h30 – 17h00

021 797 7948

Tokai

Tokai Village, Vans Road

Tues & Thurs

8h30 – 16h30

021 715 5623

Claremont

19 Belvedere Rd

Mon, Tues, Wed & Fri

8h30 – 13h30

021 797 7948

Fish Hoek

Valyland Centre

Mon - Fri

8h30 – 16h30

021 782 3322