

Have you Heard? A Listening Project
Hearing Loss Overview - Episode #19
Hosts: Jamie Machotka and Alle Rhames

(0:03) Jamie: Hello and welcome to “Have you Heard? A Listening Project.” On this podcast we’re going to share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. If you or a loved one have a hearing loss or suspect you have hearing loss or if you know anyone with hearing loss this podcast is for you. Today we’re going to discuss how hearing loss occurs. The different types of hearing loss and what the most common treatments are. We’re pleased to have you join us today, I’m Jamie, I’m one of your hosts and I’m joined by Alle. We both work together at OEI as hearing health advocates.

(0:39) Alle: Well, hey there it’s great to be here with you Jamie.

(0:42) Jamie: Yay, I love when we get to do these together, we always have fun (Alle...I do too) Yes! So, before we get into how hearing loss occurs, let’s review the many symptoms and signs of hearing loss because a lot of people don’t realize they even have hearing loss. So, Alle, you want to start us off with that?

(1:00) Alle: Sure, of course, and you couldn’t say anything more than the truth because basically I’m going to list the most common signs of hearing loss. But let me first just say that because you can experience one or more of these symptoms that it doesn’t necessarily mean that you have hearing loss and it certainly doesn’t mean that you have permanent hearing loss. We are just reviewing this real quick because we want to remind everyone to get their regular hearing check-ups.

(1:26) Jamie: Yes, contrary to popular belief, we are not doctors, we wanted to be but we aren’t. So, this is just educational, you know, for what we do for work and, and how we can just help people around us learn more so (Alle...yes) If you do have hearing loss though, we do know it’s always better to address it sooner rather than later.

(1:49) Yes, that’s the truth. Okay, so here are some common symptoms; muffling of speech and other sounds, difficulty understanding words, especially against background noise or in a crowd, trouble hearing consonants, frequently asking others to speak more slowly, clearly and loudly, needing to turn up the volume on the television or radio or needing to use captions on TV, withdrawal from conversations, avoidance of some social settings and or avoidance of telephone

use.

(2:24) Jamie: So, if you're experiencing some of these things or even if you're not you should get a hearing screening. It's quick, it's painless and you can usually get one for free.

(2:34) Alle: And let's just say that you find out you have hearing loss, Jamie, okay, so at that point, you're probably wondering how it might have occurred and that's what we're going to discuss more in detail.

(2:43) Jamie: Right. So, there are three types of hearing loss and the first one is called Conductive Hearing Loss. And Conductive Hearing Loss occurs when sounds aren't able to travel from the outer ear to the eardrum and the bones of the middle ear. Conductive hearing loss can be the result of things like ear infections, allergies, swimmer's ear, a buildup of wax in the ear.

(3:08) Alle: Ohh, ear infections, that's a big one to watch out for, especially for kids. I know someone who had a severe ear infection when she was in her teens that was left untreated. She's struggled with substantial hearing loss ever since. As she ages, it's gotten even worse for her. She often misses things and gets frustrated and feels left out trying to keep track of what has been said. She does have hearing aids which helps a lot and she also uses a CapTel Captioned Telephone to get captions on her phone which she really swears by.

(3:38) Jamie: Well, thank goodness for technology. I mean, it continues to evolve and get better and better but you know, that's, when we talk about hearing loss and especially ear infections and kids, you know, I have an almost 3 year old and he's actually had his first ear infection last week and (Alle...ohh, that's scary) Yeah, well, the scary part is the poor kid thought that he had bees in his ear (Alle...ohh) So, that for me was a telltale sign so anybody listening, you know, if you feel like you're hearing buzzing in your ear that, that's also a sign to, you know, see the doctor (Alle...right) But it's on my mind because, yes, I know this other person that, that Alle's talking about and if it's something I can prevent for my kid, I want to be able to do it so I'm definitely on the radar paying close attention to ear infections. Okay, and then another cause of Conductive, Conductive Hearing Loss that you mentioned, a buildup of ear wax. Yeap, that's a thing and it's actually, usually an easy fix. Sounds gross but it does happen and, and what happens is, you go to the doctor and they can remove the earwax from your ears, pretty easily in the office. I have another friend who unfortunately has to go and get this done every few months. And for her, it has something to do with the shape of her ear canal, the wax just can't make its way out on its own, so (Alle...interesting) She goes to the doctor and they, they remove it for her and she knows she's learned from experience when she waits too long, she notices

that her hearing will diminish.

(5:08) Alle: Mmm, that's really interesting. So, some hearing losses do have easy solutions then, would you say? So, Jamie what's another type of hearing loss?

(5:17) Jamie: Sensorineural Hearing Loss and we can call that SNHL for short, happens when there's damage to the inner ear structures, like the tiny hair cells in the inner ear or in the nerve pathways to the brain so those inner hair cells are really important because they collect and relay sound information to the brain through the auditory nerve and so, once those get damaged, hearing loss occurs. And this type of hearing loss is usually permanent. SNHL makes even distinct normal or loud sounds seem muffled or unclear and people who get SNHL, it can be a result of a birth defect that alters the structure of the ear, aging, right? We're all (Alle...oh yes) Aware of that one, that's a big one. Noise-induced hearing loss, which can also happen from working around loud noises, listening to music too loud, attending a lot of crazy loud concerts, people who use headphones at a high volume, things like that (Alle...Mmm) Also, trauma, right? Trauma to your head or skull and then there's Meniere's disease and that one is a disorder of the inner ear and that affects hearing and balance.

(6:32) Alle: I actually know a lot about Meniere's disease because my grandfather has that and so he struggled to hear for a really long time. About 20 years ago he started to notice that his balance was really off kilter and he was a golfer and so it was a really big struggle for him when he noticed that he couldn't stand the way he normally did to hit the ball, when he finally was diagnosed right with Meniere's disease. It was so tough for him because he eventually had to give up golf all together (Jamie...ohh) And basically, yeah, if you, if you have Meniere's disease it affects not only your hearing but like I just mentioned your balance as well and you can have really bad phases where you almost feel nauseous, you need to sit down you just feel awful. So, it's a, it's a difficult thing to live with for sure.

(7:16) Jamie: Oh, I'm sorry hear that, yeah, losing your balance that's no good (Alle...no) So, I'm sorry to hear he had to stop playing golf, that's unfortunate. Other causes I didn't mention yet, so infections can cause hearing loss, so not just ear infections but things like, you know, measles, mumps, meningitis, scarlet fever, those can all damage your ears. And here's one a lot of people don't always know about medications (Alle...oh yes) Yep, the American Speech Language American, that's a lot of American in that association, I think it's the American Speech Language Association they note that there are over 200 over the counter and prescription medications that may cause hearing loss. So, you know, if you're someone who's taking medications for cancer, heart disease, a serious infection, it's really important to talk to your doctor about the hearing risks that could be involved with those.

(8:20) Alle: Yeah, you know, how you always get that big print out with the possible side effects when you get a new prescription? Sometimes I don't read that but I know a lot of people who don't even glance at it but if you're experiencing hearing loss after starting a new medication, it sounds like it would be wise to investigate that.

(8:36) Jamie: Yeah, and you're not alone in that. I, I also sometimes forget to, you know, peruse that long paper. Well, it's so long sometimes it can be like three pages but (Alle...right, yeah) Especially the more I learn in the world and I have a kid to take care of, I have to read those things more carefully (Alle...yes) All right and now for the kicker, the third main type of hearing loss it's called Mixed Hearing Loss, with a Mixed Hearing Loss there is damage at the same time to the outer and middle ear's ability to conduct sound into the inner ear and the brain and damage to the inner or auditory nerve. So, that's a, that's a lot of things happening at once so (Alle...yeah) That condition, it can cause a mild or moderate to severe hearing loss.

(9:23) Alle: So that can really complicate your treatment plan, right? I guess like many other physiological problems sometimes it does take a bit of sleuthing to figure out exactly what's going on. So again, stressing the importance of regular hearing checks.

(9:37) And I think we should tell people, I've had my hearing tested recently, it's not that bad (Alle...nooo) And it actually was really quick (Alle...I thought it was super interesting) I did too, I mean maybe it's because of the line of work we're in but the funniest part to me was that I'm sort of a, not sort of, I'm a big guy and I had to sit in what I would call just a very tiny booth. So I was laughing for part of it because I felt like I was sitting in like, you know, a tiny Barbie Dreamhouse (Alle...yeah) Sort of situation and the fact that there was only room for exactly one chair and my body, like, if I wanted to turn around and scratch my back, I couldn't so that was probably the scariest part (Alle...so I'm glad that's how you felt) Yeah, that's how I felt, that's well....

(10:21) Alle: To me, it felt like you're in a Gravitron, you know, that old ride at the carnival, the Gravitron (Jamie...yes) And it gets all dark and you're spinning around, that's what it reminded me of.

(10:29) Jamie: Oh, I don't like the Gravitron so I wouldn't have like that either. But anyway, apart from the, the tiny space that I was in, it went by in like 10 minutes. I had to listened to some noises, I was supposed to raise my hand when I heard them and then the last part was the audiologist just saying words out loud and making sure that I understood what the words were and that part for me was

interesting because you, I was wearing headphones during the hearing test (Alle...right) But when she was reading the words to me the sound was not coming through the headphones and that was intentional. So, when she started doing that, I was like, excuse me, I'm not hearing you in the headphones and I was pointing at my ears and she was like right, that's, that's on purpose and I was like, oh okay. So just so you know folks, if you go for your first hearing test there might be a part where the test you and the things they're saying or noises they're making don't come through the headphones and that's planned (Alle... that's good to know Jamie, thank you) Mmhmm and now let's take a short break to hear a word from our sponsor.

*** Commercial.... We were excited when dad finally retired. More time for golf and the chance to move somewhere warm. What I didn't count on was how hard it would be to stay in touch. Dad's hearing loss makes phone calls difficult at best. I have to repeat myself every call and I'm pretty sure he doesn't get what I say. But now, dad's audiologist gave him a CapTel Captioned Telephone it works just like captions on TV only for phone calls. If dad can't hear what the caller says he just reads the captions. Dad's local CapTel Outreach person took care of everything. She helped set up the phone, explained about the free captioning service and made sure he was comfortable reading the captions. Now, we're back to talking every weekend, I know he's catching every word I say and I'm hearing a lot more about his golf scores. If someone you care about has difficulty hearing over the phone, find out how a CapTel Captioned Telephone can help. Visit oeius.org for details.

(12:34) Jamie: And we're back! So, now we know the three types of hearing loss and that's important to know because, well, each type of hearing loss gets treated in its own way. So, I don't know I think we should talk a little bit more about that Alle? (Alle...I agree) You start....

(12:48) Alle: I'll go ahead. So, most cases of Conductive Hearing Loss are temporary and they are cured by means of appropriate medical treatment, so that's good news. So, it could be something as simple as cleaning out your ear wax, as we mentioned earlier. Other types of Conductive Hearing Losses can be treated with hearing aids. So, some Conductive Hearing Loss can actually be reversed by surgery, that's really cool. So, it's important to seek medical assistance, that's the most important thing. If you have Conductive Hearing Loss.

(13:15) Jamie: Yes, and Sensorineural Hearing Loss is permanent. So, those tiny hair cells I mentioned earlier, unfortunately, they can't be repaired once they're damaged. So, for people with this type of hearing loss, hearing aids and other technology solutions are usually the gold standard treatment. And then in some cases, cochlear implants might be recommended.

(13:37) Alle: Right. So, the hearing aids that most of you might be familiar with are the ones that people can take on and take off. They're tiny receivers that amplify the sound very close to your ears. But a cochlear implant it's actually really different. Jamie, can you tell us how a cochlear implant actually works?

(13:53) Jamie: Sure, so cochlear implant it's a small electronic device that electrically stimulates the cochlear nerve and it does that for people to hear. So, follow me on this because it's really interesting and probably different from what most people are familiar with. So, it's an implant and it has external and internal parts. The external part sits behind the ear and it picks up sounds with a microphone and then it processes it and transmits it to the internal part of the implant which gets placed under the skin during outpatient surgery. So (Alle... wow) For people who haven't seen this before, it, I have friends that have them and what it looks like is for one of my friends anyway, they come just like hearing aids, they can all look a little different in shape and size but the one that I'm familiar with my friend, looks like she's got a hearing aid that's on her but then there's a little component that's round and it's attached by a little wire and that little round part sits actually right on her head behind her ear. So, it kind of looks like, well, it might actually be that she's wearing a magnet (Alle...yeah) And, and it's circular and it attaches to what looks like a hearing aid on her ear but the whole device that's called a cochlear implant.

(15:12) Alle: That's a great description. So, this is something that people might get when hearing aids just aren't helping, is that right?

(15:20) Jamie: Yes, and it's pretty amazing. It's a great option when hearing aids don't provide the clarity people need to understand speech and spoken language, you know, like I know some people who were completely deaf and heard no sound before receiving their cochlear implants and now it's revolutionized their ability to communicate.

(15:42) Alle: Yeah, I can imagine. Okay, so getting back to the third type of hearing loss and how it's treated, I'm guessing Mixed Hearing Loss would get treated with the combination of medical or surgical treatment like we would for Conductive Hearing Loss and the use of hearing aids and other technology for any Sensorineural Hearing Loss. So, it would be a combination of those things (Jamie... you got it) Nice!

(16:03) Jamie: And, and I'm glad, you know, we wanted to talk about it on the podcast today because I think there's a lot of misinformation out there and I also think for whatever reason sometimes hearing loss is taboo and people don't want to talk about it (Alle...yeah) So, I know I've come across a lot of people who don't

know what I consider to be sort of these simple things to know, right? Like, just because you're not hearing well, it doesn't mean it's the, the worst hearing loss, right? There's, there's these different things that could be, you could have ear wax that's building up in your ear, you know, some of these other things that I think people are not familiar with and I like that we took the time today to, to just chat about it as we've told everybody, Alle and I are not doctors but we're passionate people who obviously work in the hearing loss industry and these are some of the common things we come across when we talk to folks that they're just (Alle...right) Not familiar that these things exist.

(16:57) Alle: And I think it's important also to spread the knowledge about things that you can do to protect your ears like we were talking about maybe turning down the volume when you're listening to music in your headphones things like that. Think about what you can do to protect your ears now versus later.

(17:11) Jamie: Ding, ding, ding, you got it. Well, that's all we have time for today, so I'm going to wrap it up. Continuing on this season on "Have you Heard? A Listening Project" we'll continue to explore all things hearing related. And next time we're going to share thoughts from people with hearing loss on things they wished they knew or wished people has told them in regard to hearing loss and I think that one is going to be super informative for pretty much everyone, we hope you'll join us then. In the meantime, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. Thank you to everyone who has joined us today and thank you Alle for being here (Alle...well, thank you Jamie, it's always a pleasure) For more information on hearing health resources be sure to visit us at oeius.org, that's oeius.org. I'm Jamie (and I'm Alle) and we want to thank all of our listeners for joining us today on the "Have you Heard? Podcast and remember to stay safe and stay connected.

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