

Have you Heard? A Listening Project
Episode #20 - What We Wish We Knew
Hosts: Alle Rhames and Betsy Randle

0:03) Alle: 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 has a hearing loss or suspect that you have hearing loss or if you know anyone with hearing loss this podcast is for you. Today we’re going to share with you some thoughts from those who we know who struggle with hearing loss. Things that they wished that they knew before and things that they wished that others knew. We’re pleased to have you join us today and, I’m Alle, I’m one of your hosts and today I’m also joined by Betsy, hi Betsy (Betsy...hi Alle, it’s great to be here with you) Always great to be with you. We both work together at OEI as hearing health advocates. So, things I wish I knew about hearing loss before I discovered my own. It’s not surprising that we come into contact with people who have hearing loss almost every day. According to the NIH, which is the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders one in eight people over the age of 12 have hearing loss in both ears, can you believe that? (Betsy... yeah..no) No, I know, Betsy and I of course we come into contact with so many people who have hearing loss due to our business. We talked with some of them recently just to get their take. A client of mine Betsy said that they wished they knew sooner that there was a correlation between hearing loss and dementia and Alzheimer’s (Betsy...ahh) Had they known they would have probably gotten hearing aids sooner.

(1:34) Betsy: Well, we’ve discussed this in previous episodes about how hearing loss can affect the brain (Alle...right) So, it makes sense but I imagine is rather shocking to hear that for the first time (Alle...right) It makes me grateful I’ve addressed my own hearing loss and gotten hearing aids, yeah for me, it’s important to be proactive.

(1:52) Alle: It really is and now, a lot of people are unaware of this correlation between dementia and hearing loss and that’s really because it’s a relatively new finding (Betsy...yeah) So, John Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging released the results from their study in 2011 and that’s really when we all learned about the connection. So, you know, it wasn’t that long ago, the results show that straining to hear really toxics the brain and on top of that hearing loss causes social isolation, as we know, which is a known risk factor for dementia and other cognitive disorders. So, fast forward to someone who learns about this after

struggling to hear for years. Someone who may have put off getting hearing aids and as you can imagine, it's disconcerting.

(2:36) Betsy: Yes, so that's why it's so important for us to spread the knowledge (Alle...right) That reminds me, I recently read in consumer reports on Health, my favorite magazine, something, something I wish I knew before and that is, that what we eat has a huge effect on our brain and our ability to hear better (Alle... mmmm) Alle, you addressed this a lot in a, in a previous podcast so feel free to chime in about your Mediterranean diet and all that. But, but I thought of you when I read this.

(3:06) Alle: Yes, it's yeah, well thank you. It's so true, the Mediterranean diet is something that's supposed to be very beneficial for our brain health and I mean, I always try to eat healthy but, did you know that there's actually certain foods that are really, really good for your ear health?

(3:21) Betsy: Yes, that's right! The director, I know, I learned this too (Alle...it's important) Recently, I did not know this before. The director of the Conservation of Hearing study in Boston said, and I quote higher intakes of fruits and vegetables and lower intakes of sodium and saturated fat, that Mediterranean diet we were talking about, all contain plenty of beta-carotene, folate and omega-3 fatty acids, which seems to be particularly hearing protective. And they said that these, yeah, these eating plans may help, get this, in part by promoting blood flow to the inner ear's cochlea, so whose tiny hair cells transmit messages that the brain interprets as sound (Alle...wow) Isn't that great? I didn't know that (Alle...it's so cool) I didn't know, that may help protect against age-related declines in cochlear function too.

(4:19) Alle: Well, it makes me want to run right out to the market and stock up on kale and spinach (Betsy...yeah, does it have to kale and spinach, can it be something else?) No, there's other things you can get too.

(4:29) Betsy: I know, I know. Okay, I'll say one thing I just learned another thing. I just learned that a lot of new things; mag, magnesium is another vitamin that's really good for your ears, I didn't know that, now I'm taking more magnesium and did you know that dark chocolate contains a lot of that, yippee, yippee (Alle... yum) It doesn't have to be only green leafy vegetables, oh cashews, pumpkin seeds, those are good too.

(4:56) Alle: I love pumpkin seeds (Betsy...me too) I am someone that always roasts my pumpkin seeds after Halloween if we have pumpkins (Betsy...yeah, yeah) So, what else do we wish that we knew? Let's see, so listening to loud music, whether it's in your headphones or at a live concert can lead to noise-

induced hearing loss. So, I guess having my stereo speakers rock the house or car was not such a good idea when I was younger, which I definitely did. Next time I go to hear live music I won't stand up in the front next to the speaker and I definitely will wear ear protection. In fact, I look at a lot of people around me when they're driving their cars these days and I really notice the people that have their sound up so loud and I think to myself, you are going to regret that (Betsy... yeah) Speaking of loud, did you know that the louder the people speak the more distorted the message becomes? (Betsy...yes) I didn't know that (Betsy...yes, I knew that) I didn't know that (Betsy...I experienced that, yeah) Right, okay, there you go, well, so, so many times that I have heard of people complain about it but I didn't understand it. So, it's not about shouting to be heard it's about communicating, making eye contact and enunciating (Betsy...okay, can we just say that like 10 times to everybody) Okay, I'll say it one more time, it's about communicating, making eye contact and enunciating.

(6:12) Betsy: Yes, that is so absolutely true and actually, I think another thing is that people think is good is hiding your hearing loss. Something people think that to take care of themselves but actually it's, it's not helpful. So, let's say you think that the only way to stay connected you just smile and not having no idea what's being said and ultimately leading to missed out conversations with friends and family and, and feeling left out in a group conversation. It's true though, you are indeed feeling left out (Alle...right) You do feel unheard and under, under expressed or unexpressed and in a way, to tell you the truth, it's kind of, it's kind of abandoning yourself (Alle...yeah) Because you're trying to hide your hearing loss does not work especially when trying to understand important information from a doctor or when calling customer service and oh, by the way, sometimes people's accents make it even harder to understand as well So once again, don't be afraid to ask for clarification, you're not alone especially on the phone which I think we should talk about later.

(7:22) Alle: Yes, that's so good Betsy (Betsy...mhhh, I know) And for those of you who are like us with kids, as a parent, conversations with your children are so important. So, pretending to hear what your children are telling you when you actually can't understand them doesn't work and I, I have done that, I do that. Your children know that you can't hear them and will call you out on it which they do and they have (Betsy...yeah) Which is actually a very loving thing to do if you think about it.

(7:51) Betsy: It really is, actually I love that. So, Alle, now that I'm personally living with hearing loss, I never thought I would experience so many emotions from having it. It's kind of embarrassing knowing that while people are speaking often even though I have hearing aids sometimes I, I only hear their mumbled voices and have no idea what they're saying or can't, you know, very, very little of

what they're saying and I sometimes, I feel angry when I feel someone gives me an eye roll when I ask them to repeat themselves, really? The anxiety, the anxiety that comes from hearing loss, I, I worry about a lot of things but what if I don't hear something important? What if I misunderstand someone and embarrass myself.

(8:38) Alle: The dreaded eye roll (Betsy...yeah) I know it all too well. It really is so disrespectful and so hurtful, so, I'm sorry Betsy. Okay, well now we're going to take a short break to hear from our sponsor and then we'll return to discuss those things that we wish others knew.

*** Commercial.... So, mom finally decided to sell the house and move into that cute condo near her sister, I'm happy for her and there's so much to do. The problem is, she can't hear me when I call. Even with her hearing aids, trying to talk about details over the phone is impossible. I'm constantly repeating myself and half the time I don't really think she gets what I said. Fortunately, we learned about the CapTel Captioned Telephone, it works just like captions on TV. If she can't hear what I say she can read the captions. Our local CapTel Outreach person took care of everything. She helped set up the phone, explained about the free captioning service and made sure that mom was comfortable reading the captions. Now mom has the confidence to handle details over the phone by herself knowing she'll catch every word. 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.

(9:53) Alle: And we're back!

(9:55) Betsy: Okay, so getting back to what we wish other people knew, those without hearing loss. Now, I mentioned that terrible feeling I get when someone is annoyed that I've asked them to repeat themselves, that's really unfair. People who hear really have no idea what a struggle it is when you have hearing loss (Alle...that's true, that's true) So, we do need to educate people and stand up for ourselves. Ask them to speak clearly and to face us while speaking, we mentioned that, don't cover your mouth when speaking and please don't speak with a mouth full it's really hard to understand when you're chewing (Alle...ha, ha) There's a few people I know personally that do that, I won't mention names so, so many people have the habit of doing that and, and we established that louder isn't better others shouting at people with hearing loss doesn't really help like we said before.

Alle (10:47) Right. Once you explain to people about your hearing loss hopefully, they will be more cognizant of how they are speaking to you and maybe even change their ways.

(10:56) Betsy: And also, it's surprising how many insensitive things people say. I hate to (Alle...right) Say it but it's you and this happens more than you think. Constantly being told that you don't look like you have hearing loss or you're too young to have hearing loss (Alle...I hate that one) The stereotype of hearing loss is some over 65, as we know hearing loss is an invisible disability and does not discriminate between young and old, it varies. So, what, that comment feels so dismissive like (Alle...yes it does) You must be fooling yourself or something what's wrong with, it's not a compliment.

(11:33) Alle: No, it's definitely not. Hearing loss is a disability that you have to normalize in your everyday routine it's not a false and it's not a shame based in any way, you simply have to accept that you're part of a group who has a disability and you are taking care of that as best as you can. And, it's actually a large group it's estimated that over 48 million Americans have hearing loss, did you know that? (Betsy...No) So you're not alone. Here's one way to normalize your hearing loss. Hearing aids are not like glasses having them doesn't eliminate your hearing loss but hearing aids are like glasses or especially like contacts in that sometimes you have to try different ones to find the best fit.

(12:15) Betsy: That so true Alle, I, I get it, I, I had my hearing aids remolded once or twice so that helps, it makes it better. Even with hearing aids though, I'm finding myself still challenged and ask people to repeat themselves frequently sometimes, like for example food orders or row number (Alle...yeah) Or telephone numbers (Alle...yes) I have to say back to people over the phone in particularly or spelling, you know, email addresses and things like that so (Alle...yeap) Yeah it doesn't go away. Here's another thing I wish other people knew, listening fatigue it's a real thing. We've talked about it before on another podcast, when a person has a hearing loss at any level we noticed that hearing takes work and it takes extra time to process what someone is saying sounds are fuzzy, loud noises make your head hurt and you're just exhausted after a long conversation even though you look fine on the outside you're constantly straining to hear every word and make sense of sounds coming at you from all sides especially in a crowd. Hearing loss leaves you guessing filling in the blanks and trying to follow conversations with half the words missing. All this extra processing leaves your brain worn-out, I'm worn-out just telling you this. And, and you wish your friends could understand how tired you sometimes are.

(13:40) Alle: Right. And for example. So, you're continually having to advocate for yourself by telling people that you have a hearing loss so they need to repeat what they are saying so that you can understand them. And then when the situation calls for it, I'm not ignoring you or being rude chances are I just didn't hear what you said. I'm still a person not taking the time to repeat yourself when I

don't understand answering for me when I didn't ask you to and in general making things easy for yourself and not for the person with the hearing loss is hurtful.

(14:11) Betsy: Yeah, it really is, it's annoying when I see that going down man, I really don't like that. Listen, so, let me just say your support, you are a person, person who doesn't have hearing loss, your support means a lot and taking the time to get my attention and facing me when you speak, being patient when I don't understand and being willing to take the extra time to communicate with me means the world to me. Like, okay, maybe rephrase rather than repeat, if I'm just not getting something try saying it a different way instead of repeating it. There's a good chance it'll be less frustrating for both of us, it's just a thought.

(14:52) Alle: It's a good thought, it's a good thought. I'm reminded of some of the comments that I get from friends and relatives of the CapTel Captioned Telephone users that we know. They are so grateful that their friend or relatives has gotten the phone because it makes communicating with them so much easier. Not only is the person with hearing loss thrilled to be catching every single word but those that they're talking to are much less frustrated themselves. So, there's really nothing worse than feeling like someone isn't really hearing you, it's really tough. So, taking the time to make that extra effort to help your friend with hearing loss understand you can only lead to better things.

(15:31) Betsy: Absolutely, that's beautiful. Okay, well that reminds me of something. There's a quote from George Bernard Shaw, you ready? (Alle... okay?) "The biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place" (Alle...mhmm) Mmmm, It kind of says it all, right?

(15:50) Alle: It's really good food for thought, yes (Betsy...yep) Well and that's a perfect note to end on Bets, thank you so much (Betsy...you're so welcome) And thank you all for listening to "Have you Heard? A Listening Project. Continuing on this season on this podcast, we'll continue to explore all things hearing related. Next time we're going to delve into hearing loss and kids. As we mentioned, hearing loss is not just about senior citizens so we want to definitely devote some time to discussing the little ones in our lives, we hope that you'll definitely join us then. In the meantime, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. Thank you to everybody who's joined us today and again, thank you Betsy (Betsy...as always, a pleasure) For more information on hearing health resources be sure to visit us at oeius.org that's o-e-i-u-s.org and remember to stay safe and stay connected. Bye.