

Have you Heard? A Listening Project
Episode 17 – Adjusting to Your Hearing Loss
Hosts: Alle Rhames and Betsy Randle

(0:02) Alle: Hi everyone 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 if you suspect that you have a hearing loss or if you know anyone just with a hearing loss this podcast is for you. Today we’re going to discuss steps two in your hearing loss journey. Once you determine that you have hearing loss what you do with that information. We’re going to focus on getting hearing aids as that is a great solution for so many people. 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 my good friend Betsy (Betsy...hi Alle) - Hi Bets. Betsy and I both work together at OEI as hearing health advocates and Betsy is the perfect person for this topic as she discovered just a couple of years ago that she had a hearing loss which was interfering with her daily life. So, Betsy, it’s really great to have you here with me.

(1:05) Betsy: Yes, this is definitely a topic I can speak to from firsthand experience, so hi!

(1:12) Alle: For anyone who is diagnosed with hearing loss you can get your results and well for a while you probably just think it over. Maybe you don’t feel ready to do anything yet or maybe you’re hearing isn’t that bad and you’re not really sure that you want to get hearing aids if that’s what’s recommended by your hearing care provider. You’ve heard stories, you’ve heard complaints and so on from those who have taken the plunge. Maybe you can get by with a little bit of this, a little bit of hearing loss. Okay, well maybe not for many people the next step will be figuring out if they can benefit from assistive devices, like hearing aids, amplified or captioning telephones or any of the many other products that can help. I know that for you Betsy, you finally did take the plunge and got hearing aids, so how was that for you?

(1:57) Betsy: Yeah, it was a big step once I decided to give hearing aids a chance as I finally did. It does take time to adjust to everything especially when you’re told to wear them at least 8 hours a day so your brain, that’s so your brain adjusts to them which I didn’t know before. In fact, you won’t adjust if you keep taking them out, I found that out.

(2:22) Alle: That’s really interesting. I bet there’s a lot of people that don’t know

that so that really is a common issue with new wearers. People think that you can just wear them for certain situations but really the truth is, taking them on and off makes them more difficult to use. So for you, after getting the hearing aids, what changed?

(2:38) Betsy: Well at first, I found myself feeling isolated and alone as if I was in some kind of echo chamber and I felt left out somehow from those voices outside my head like my husband or my adult children or group settings. So, this is real stuff to get used to and, do I have to listen to every background sound in the world? I didn't really want to hear the sound of my refrigerator motor rumbling in the kitchen all day long or, or the ever so loud car motor that, you know, you're actually, or this I hear myself chew, like, like gum, crackers, chips those are the worst. I was taken aback and if you think about it, your ear canal and drum is quite close to the jawbone, who knew? I rest my case.

(3:30) Alle: Ha, ha, I only laugh because it's so interesting it's so obvious that it is right, right near your jawbone so, of course it would make sense that you would hear yourself chew louder and what a thing that would be to hear. These are all the things that, you know, you couldn't hear before and now you're thinking that the hearing loss was a reprieve from all these sounds.

(3:51) Betsy: Yes, that's a very graceful way of saying it Alle but yes, I didn't see this coming at first but after a while, I, I started to get used to some of these unwanted sounds. And believe it or not, I have to admit that they do get less demanding of my attention and, and what's great is that my audiologist has made several adjustments to make sure the fit that, that I have is perfect for me and she's like done three different molds for my left ear and it just seems to have an issue because it's shaped differently. Everybody's ear drum or canal is different but it's not always a one and done sort of thing when you get fitted.

(4:33) Alle: So, if any of you wear contacts you may have had a similar experience with your first pair of those. Some felt weird in your eyes, some were drying, one eye was blurry maybe. Well, it's kind of the same with hearing aids. So, I just recommend to be patient.

(4:48) Betsy: Yeah, absolutely Alle, eventually, you know what, you forget you're wearing your hearing aids. You just forget that they're even in there and you just get used to hearing more without a big struggle. Your brain does adjust as the doctor said it would to the new reality and it's not perfect. But you have to admit that it is helping you communicate better and then you start to feel gratitude that you no longer feel left out of conversations and you don't always feel left out or behind of everyone else (Alle...Ohhh, I bet that was a huge relief) It was, well there may still be some challenges to come to terms with and, but I'm noticing

that if you're, if you're open to trying new things, there's a good chance you can find what you need to do to make something happen. I'll use myself as an example (Alle...please yeah) Which I seemed to be doing a lot here. For me it's about singing with or without hearing aids. Now, I didn't think about this — with hearing aids, they somehow alter how I experienced my voice in my head, how I hear myself and the placement of my voice that I was used to going by. Now, I'm a professional singer, so this is something I need to come to terms with. My audiologist told me that some musicians choose not to perform with hearing aids in because of that but some of them need them to hear other instruments or tones, music cues or other voices. Now, I'm still exploring this but I will say I'm trying to practice singing with them in just in case I can get used to that. But just recently I was surprised when I started singing with only one hearing aid in, I had not tried that before. My left hearing aid was in the hearing aid hospital and being remolded to sit more perfectly in my left ear again which is why I was only wearing that one. Well, surprise blessings come in in disguises I found myself signing more freely with just the one and I kind of liked it. So, I talked to my audiologist yesterday and she acknowledged that the combination of the amplification of the one ear where the hearing aid is and the natural sound of the other might just be the ticket for signing, it's kind of crazy but I like it. I can, I can feel my placement but I still get the amplification, isn't that crazy? (Alle... I love it. I love that because) Yeah, sorry, no go ahead.

(7:23) Alle: No, it's just that's your personal experience that I think maybe others can really relate to and I never thought of that so (Betsy...I didn't either) one hearing aid, that's great.

(7:34) Betsy: Yeah, but it's empowering to know that I have a choice and that's kind of my button to that story because I, I just kept trying new things until it worked.

(7:42) Alle: Absolutely. Okay, and now a word from our sponsor.

*** 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 it's 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 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.

(8:45) Alle: Welcome back to "Have you Heard? A Listening Project." So, I am now reminded of a story that I know personally because it's about my own grandfather. My grandfather has Meniere's disease, which is a very severe form of hearing loss. He first found out that he had hearing loss about 50 years ago. So, he's 95 right now and he was really just in denial and really didn't want to do anything about it. So, it made me think about this because of the fact that he didn't want to get hearing aids at all. Even though he really started to kind of become isolated even in our huge family, I noticed he stopped engaging in these conversations and this is when I was really little so I actually noticed that. So, I think the key thing for him was, he was a big golf player and he loves good foods. We love to go to restaurants and he really was not able to engage in conversations at restaurants anymore. So, he finally caved as he put it and got hearing aids. I think that was when he was in his 60's. So, anyways, he's been wearing his hearing aids everyday since and he's completely come to terms with the fact they helped him tremendously in terms of life quality. So much so, in fact that, I think it was about a month ago he lost one of his hearing aids so he only had one as well but his loss is so severe that he was so grateful, it reminded him to be grateful to have both hearing aids so that, when he got both back he just was able to hear again, participate in conversations and go have that good food at the restaurants, you know, and be able to hear people again, you know what I mean?

(10:19) Betsy: Yeah. Well, I do and I also know that, you know, when you get hearing aids it's a prescription that they set up with your, your chart or whatever that's called that, that where they know exactly what you need to have the best hearing for yourself. And, and if you're not wearing them properly or you have one that's missing that is altering that, that prescription or at least you're not getting your, you know, your perfect amount.

(10:45) Alle: Right. Well just in that way Betsy then, how is your everyday routine changed?

(10:49) Betsy: Well, when I wake up in the morning I stop and think how about how early I want to put my hearing aids in, you know, maybe enjoy the quiet at first say good morning to the refrigerator and then when the news comes on the TV, I, I put them in and the day starts. I have to remember to take them out before I get in the shower or go swimming. That's kind of a new thing — and tuck them in before I hit the sac. But I have noticed in crowd settings such as a party with music and lots of people talking, I still have trouble hearing individual voices

often — not as much as before when I couldn't hear anything anybody was saying unless they had a really loud voice but now I find myself focusing, focusing on one person at a time and I actually move myself to sit a bit closer to them. And so in a way I am what we say here on these podcasts practicing self-advocating. That's new for me even though I wear my hearing aids, there are still times I need to adjust to fit the situation but it's okay, it's an act of self-care is all.

(11:57) Alle: Oh yeah, it's so important to provide self-care to ourselves. And can you also share Betsy so what's been the best result of wearing your hearing aids?

(12:06) Betsy: Well for me Alle mostly it's about hearing my husband. As I've said in previous episodes he had tongue cancer and his vocal cords were challenged by the radiation — and not so much the chemo, but the radiation — and so he has a tendency to look down a bit when he speaks in a rather low tone and so I have to ask him to look up when you speak so I can make out what words he's saying and when he does, between that and me wearing my hearing aids, it's a much better fit, it is so much better than it used to be.

(12:42) Alle: Oh, I love hearing that, hearing your husband is definitely key (Betsy...yeah, ha ha, you think?) So, it's a process really like most things in life. Moving on a bit then, another thing I really want to touch upon today is that there are many different types of hearing aids, many different types of hearing aids. Some are a bit more sophisticated and have Bluetooth technology. So the advantage to Bluetooth technology is that you can then pair your aids with different devices to get the sound from that device to go right into your ear.

(13:14) Betsy: Yeah, that is a really cool thing. I have to say, I personally don't have Bluetooth in my smaller inserted hearing aids, they, they, it just isn't available yet but my audiologist is hopeful about that that sometime they'll be able to do that but even so I have experienced the benefits of Bluetooth technology when I have installed our CapTel Captioned phone as you well know Alle, for those who have that capability and I can tell they really do, it really does help with amplification so a lot of people do swear by them.

(13:49) Alle: And I'm really glad you brought that up Betsy because here's another, another story about my grandfather but he is the best person that I can attest to. He has his CapTel phone and he has his Bluetooth hearing aids and actually about a month ago he was able to pair his Bluetooth hearing aids directly to the CapTel phone without a streamer or a clip which it's a very particular kind of aids that can do that and (Betsy...cool) He was able to answer the phone, hang up the phone, have a full conversation away from the CapTel phone and the sound was going directly in his ears. He (Betsy...wow) was still able to walk

up and look at the captions when he needed them, but it was the ability, you know, kind of be free from just sitting in one place. It's really incredible what the Bluetooth technology has become (Betsy...yeah) And another example also would be when you're watching TV with others so rather than needing to have the volume up way high, which could be really bothersome for people who do hear well, you could get audio in your ears which makes listening so much more pleasurable for everyone (Betsy...oh yeah) You know? So, I think we are running a little long on time here, this is such a great topic. So, we're going to have to wrap this up, unfortunately. The bottom line is really that hearing aids can be a wonderful hearing loss solution but you should take the time to be fitted with the ones which are right for you and also be patient as you transition to wearing them.

(15:17) Yeah, really that's so true and, and once you get that, once you get that figured out and it really is like a whole new world has opened up to you. It's, it's an adjust met but really, really well worth the time and effort.

(15:32) Alle: I agree. Oh Betsy, well thank you so much for sharing your personal story with us because it's really great exploring this issue with you (Betsy...yeah, absolutely it was my pleasure) Continuing on this season of Have you Heard? we'll explore different hearing loss solutions in depth. Join us next time when our topic is "Moving On: Hearing Loss Beyond the Hearing Aid." We'll share with you practical tips and advice for navigating the everyday world. We really hope that you'll join us then, in the meantime, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. Also, for more information on hearing health resources be sure to visit us at oeius.org, that's o-e-i-u-s.org. I'm Alle (and I'm Betsy) 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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