

Hillcrest Hearing News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Fall 2010

The Emotions of Losing Hearing by Richard Carmen, Au.D.

Much has changed in hearing aid and telephone technology in just the past few years. With the advent of devices such as Bluetooth cell phones and iPod earbuds, wearing anything in the ear is commonplace, maybe even fashionable.

What we're seeing is a sweeping shift in acceptance of "things" worn in or about our ears. But that is not to say all is well on the hearing frontier. Do you remember your initial reaction to learning you have hearing loss and should use hearing aids? It can hit you like a brick. For many, it's a hard pill to swallow.

From more than three decades of clinical practice, I've observed some compelling emotions and feelings in my patients.

Hearing is an essential human sense. It allows us to communicate with our family and friends, to share our ideas, our thoughts and feelings. Perhaps that's why Helen Keller said she considered her deafness more serious than her blindness. Her visual loss separated her from the *physical* world. Her hearing loss placed a barrier between her and the *people* around her.

When hearing declines, you may compensate without being aware of it. You may cup your hand around your ear, listen more attentively, and focus sharply on the speaker. These things do help you "hear" better. In fact, these compensations can fool you into believing that you hear fine. It's just one reason that loss of hearing creeps up on you.

Another reason is that our ego is quite attached to our overall health. Most of us like to think of ourselves as being in

shape, with a good heart, strong bones and good hearing. The realization of hearing loss places you at a crossroads, offering two quite opposing paths. The first is to admit hearing loss; the second is to deny it.

The first path—admitting it—allows you to seek solutions to enhance your quality of life, and the lives of the people around you. The second decision—denying it—negatively affects every aspect of your life, damages relationships and decreases your quality of life.



Seeking help for your hearing loss allows you to break free of dependence on others and can strengthen your relationships with the people around you.

Similarly, there are two common approaches for dealing with hearing loss in our relationships with others: cover it up or tell others that you have a hearing loss and there are times when you don't hear well.

"Your reactions will be influenced by how you feel about yourself and the world around you."

Of course, describing how you experience your own hearing loss is a complex matter. Furthermore, your reactions to hearing loss do not correlate to the degree of impairment. A mild loss can affect your life more profoundly than hearing loss affects someone with a severe loss.

Probably the single most common experience among people with untreated hearing loss is embarrassment. Even the thought of wearing hearing aids is embarrassing for many people. Ironically, failure to get help usually causes even more embarrassment.

The good news is that feelings of embarrassment can be significantly reduced by the cosmetic appeal of new hearing aids, such as open ear fittings. These devices allow you to break free of dependence on others and can strengthen your relationships with the people around you, rather than live in a world of embarrassment caused by ignoring the problem.

Your reactions will be influenced by how you feel about yourself and the world around you, your personality type, and how people close to you deal with your hearing problem. The most important rule to keep in mind is you must be honest with yourself.

Condensed from *The Emotions of Losing Hearing*, a chapter in *The Consumer Handbook on Hearing Loss & Hearing Aids*, Richard E. Carmen, Au.D., editor, by permission of Auride Ink Publishers. Please contact our office for information on how to obtain a copy of the complete handbook.

What Does Hearing Loss Sound Like?

What would it be like to have a family member or friend experience what your hearing is like?

Conductive hearing loss (such as the loss caused by impacted wax or ear infection) is basically a loss of hearing sensitivity. The inner ear itself is not

affected. However, sensorineural hearing loss, the most common type found in adults, involves damage to the inner ear, causing distorted speech perception and hypersensitivity to loud sounds.

To get a sense of what it's like to have a hearing loss, go to facstaff.uww.edu/bradleys/radio/hlsimulation.

Developed by Scott Bradley, Ph.D., of the University of Wisconsin, the site simulates different degrees and patterns of hearing loss. Of course, it's not the same as truly experiencing hearing loss full-time. This includes misunderstanding a friend or spouse or choosing not to go to a social function because of the communication difficulties. People with *untreated* hearing loss are more likely to experience anxiety, social isolation and depression.

The Ear Echo

Your ear generates an echo when it "hears" sound. These echoes—called otoacoustic emissions—can be recorded by placing a microphone in the ear canal.

This measurement is done with automated screening equipment and is widely used to test hearing in newborn babies. Today more than 90% of babies have their hearing tested before they leave the hospital.

Did You Know?

- Our eyes are the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.
- No word in the English language rhymes with *month*, *orange*, *silver* or *purple*.
- There are more chickens than people in the world.

The Heart Of A Hearing Aid

A hearing aid is made up of many electronic parts all necessary for it to function. But do you know about the **HEART** of a hearing aid? It is at the core of this function and it starts beating when you say, "Yes, I need help with my hearing." It beats stronger when you can now hear the special people in your life. What happens when the device stops working and needs to be replaced? These old units can be donated, allowing that heart to continue beating and providing the gift of hearing to someone else. In October, Allen Massie, Hearing Instrument Specialist and Dr. William Turner will go on a medical mission trip to Peru. With your support, hundreds of people will receive the gift of hearing. Donated hearing aids, can be dropped off at any of our locations. Keep the heart beating of these old devices and make a difference in someone else's life!

At this time we also remember our good friend and former manager of HHA for 39 years, Ronald Proehl, who passed away July 10, at age 75. Ron was the first manager of Hillcrest beginning in 1964. He was also Past President of the Ohio Hearing Aid Society. He made a difference in countless lives and will be dearly missed.

Sincerely,

The Audiologists, Dispensers and Staff of Hillcrest Hearing Aids & Balance Center
950 E. Alex Bell Rd. 369 W. First Street, #406 9000 North Main Street, #319
Centerville, OH 45459 Dayton, OH 45402 Dayton, OH 45415
(937) 435-7476 (937) 222-0022 (937) 832-3582
1861 Towne Park Drive, #H 1189 Wayne Avenue
Troy, OH 45373 Greenville, OH 45331
(937) 222-0022 (937) 222-0022

We now accept used hearing aid batteries for recycling.

An Open Approach to Hearing

Advances in digital processing, feedback control and tubing and receiver technology have led to a new style of hearing aid fitting. With this approach, almost nothing is placed in the ear canal itself. Because the ear canal remains mostly open, the sound has a very natural quality. Often the hearing aid user is not even aware that he or she is using hearing aids.

Called the *open-fit* hearing aid, this approach is designed for people with milder hearing loss. For these people, the chief complaint is speech *clarity*, not *loudness*.

Battery warning: Batteries can be harmful if swallowed. If someone swallows a battery, call your physician or the National Battery Hotline at (202) 625-3333.

The open fitting approach is actually not new, but advances in hearing aid technology have made this approach more effective. The hearing aid itself is a very small, lightweight instrument. It's usually worn behind the ear, although some models fit entirely into the outer ear. Nothing goes into the ear canal other than a very thin tube with a small tip or receiver.

Some people say this approach is like getting "reading glasses for the ear." It's most appropriate for people who need help for difficult settings, but have little difficulty in one-to-one settings. In many cases, people with more significant hearing loss can also use open-fit hearing aids successfully.

Bluetooth in Hearing Aids

Hearing aids can now use Bluetooth technology to achieve wireless connectivity.

Wireless technology allows hearing aids to communicate with each other, sharing information about the sound and background noise around you. Some hearing aids can automatically detect when you bring a telephone to your ear and then amplify only the voice on the phone.

These hearing aids can also connect wirelessly to a television set. This allows sound to be sent from the television directly to your hearing aids, eliminating amplification of room noise or other voices.