

Hillcrest HealthCare News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends



Summer 2011

If You're Going to the Hospital . . .

A hospital stay is stressful for anyone. If you have a hearing loss, the normal stress of the hospital setting can be intensified by the communication difficulties caused by your hearing loss.

Remember, hearing loss is an invisible condition, one that is often misunderstood. Doctors, nurses, aides, and other staff may not be aware of your hearing difficulties. A key to overcoming this is clear, two-way communication between you and your health care professionals.

Take care . . . hearing aids have a tendency to get lost during hospital stays!

Tips for you and your family

- Be sure to tell the admissions office, the nursing station, and the nurses and aides around you that you have a hearing loss. Don't assume they know!
- Ask that the International Symbol for Hearing Impairment be placed on your chart and on your door as a reminder to the hospital staff.
- If you have spare hearing aids, use them rather than your newer ones. Hearing aids have a tendency to get lost during hospital stays!
- Place your hearing aids in a special container with your name on it for safekeeping when you're not using them.
- Ask for assistive listening devices for the television and telephone (or you may want to bring your own).
- Try using the built-in captioning available on the television set (usually accessible through the remote control).
- It helps to have someone around when you're talking with your doctors.

You and your family can be advocates, explaining to physicians, nurses and others how to make communication easier and more effective for someone with a hearing loss. *Feel better!*

Summer Reminder

Although modern hearing aids are much more resistant to moisture problems than in the past, moisture can still cause hearing aid malfunction—especially in the summer. Try to keep your hearing aids away from moisture and high humidity. Consider placing your hearing aids in a dri-aid jar or electric drying unit overnight. Both are available from our office.

What's My Role?

The Hearing Partnership

In our last issue we wrote that good hearing care is a partnership between you and us—and the more important partner is *you*.

Since you're reading this newsletter, you've probably taken the most important steps already. You acknowledged your hearing loss. You sought professional care. You took an active and positive step in managing your hearing loss. What else can you do to make sure that you're hearing as well as possible?

Be positive. Your attitude toward your hearing is as important as the hearing loss itself. Some people concentrate on what they can't do—such as hear well in a noisy restaurant. Others look at the glass as "half-full," and enjoy all the situations where they *are* able to hear.

Take good care of your hearing. Regular audiologic evaluations and hearing aid cleaning and adjustments ensure you're hearing as well as possible. Avoid loud sounds and noisy settings to protect your hearing and make listening more enjoyable.

Take good care of your hearing aids. Hearing aids are complex, sophisticated electronic instruments. They require routine care. Call us as soon as you notice any hearing aid problem. The sooner we can check it, the more likely we can take care of the problem, usually right in our office.

Directional Hearing Aids: Understanding Speech in Noise

Did you know that your ears are directional? The shape of our ear blocks some of the sound coming from behind, while collecting sound coming from the side and front.

Some animals, such as horses and dogs, can actually move their ears, which gives them highly directional hearing and the ability to tell very accurately where sound is coming from.

Hearing aids can also be directional. Directional hearing instruments have been available for more than 25 years, but there have been significant improvements in recent years.

Directional hearing aids can provide more amplification for sounds coming from the front, and less amplification for sounds from the back. This can make it easier to understand speech when there's background noise. Since you usually face the speaker, the speech (from the front) is

Take advantage of lipreading. Lipreading is like having a third hearing aid—and it's free! Most people with hearing loss are already good lipreaders. The most important lipreading tip: look at the person who's talking!

Consider other sources of help. Devices such as telephone amplifiers and wireless systems for television can provide additional help for situations that are especially difficult. Call us if you would like specific suggestions.

Educate your family and friends. Letting the people around you know you have a hearing loss is a lot easier than trying to hide it. Have you shared these tips for good hearing with your family and friends?

- Don't expect me to understand you if you speak from another room.
- Please get my attention before speaking and look at me when you talk to me.
- If I misunderstand you, it's my hearing, not a lack of interest.

As an active partner in your hearing healthcare, you have the satisfaction of knowing you're doing everything possible to hear as well as possible. And you're not alone—we're on your team too!



amplified more and the noise (from behind) is amplified less.

In the past, the hearing aid user chose whether the instrument was in "directional" or "non-directional" mode. Today, hearing aids use digital technology to control directionality automatically and more precisely. The hearing aid might amplify sounds from all around the wearer, but automatically go into directional mode if someone is talking. To accomplish this, the hearing aid must be able to distinguish between speech and noise.

Directional hearing aids make it easier to understand speech in noisy settings, but of course, there are limitations. What if you're driving your car and you want to hear the person sitting behind you? This is a challenge even for someone with normal hearing—but research and technology may provide help even for this challenging condition.

Hearing Better Means Feeling Better

Did you know that hearing aids may help you *feel* better?

A University of Florida study asked twenty adults with hearing loss questions about their health and about how they *characterized* their health. Each was then fit with hearing aids. Six months later, they were asked the same questions about their health. The results showed a significant improvement in how they *felt* about their health after using hearing aids. While their actual health status remained the same, it seems that the improved communication provided by the *hearing aids had a positive effect* on their overall general health perceptions.

Numerous studies have shown how untreated hearing loss has a significant negative impact on an individual's overall quality of life. The use of hearing aids is the number one form of treatment for hearing loss. These latest research results support receiving treatment for a hearing loss as soon as it is diagnosed. Don't delay seeking help for a hearing loss and don't delay treatment!

Sincerely,

The Audiologists, Dispensers and Staff of Hillcrest Hearing Aids & Balance Center

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Tactics to Improve Listening and Hearing

Abridged from an article by Mark Ross, Ph.D., audiologist and professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut.

Hearing tactics means changing the environment to make it easier for you to understand people. That means that you plan ahead, marshal your resources, and engage the "enemy"—the difficult communication situation. Here are some examples:

Move closer. Always try to get closer to the person talking. This is a valuable but underestimated technique. If you're eight feet from someone and you move to within four feet, the voice is significantly louder.

Quiet the room. When you walk into a restaurant and hear loud music, what do you do? If you explain that music makes speech comprehension virtually impossible,

the manager may graciously comply with your request—and other diners will thank you!

Ask for the quietest table. Better yet, look for restaurants that encourage private conversations. Seat yourself in the center of your group, where it's easier for you to see and hear everyone.

Many people feel they should have music on when entertaining people in their home. A gentle reminder to turn it off usually suffices. The television should be turned down or off, or try to move your personal conversation to a quieter area in the house.

You can also ask that only one person talk at a time. Cross-conversation presents one of the most difficult situations for people with hearing loss.

Advance planning. Before you attend a lecture, call ahead to see if they have an assistive listening device available. I would not attend any large area listening situation without one. Otherwise, I either don't know what's going on or I'm straining so hard to hear that I don't enjoy the activity.

Remember the three themes.

- *Acknowledge* your hearing loss.
- Be *assertive* in approaching hearing situations.
- Remember that *your efforts serve the purposes of both parties* in the communication exchange.

Condensed with permission from The Consumer Handbook on Hearing Loss & Hearing Aids, Richard Carmen, Editor, Auricle Ink.