

Hillcrest HealthCare News[®]

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends

Summer 2013

Summer Travel Tips

These suggestions should make your summer travels more enjoyable:

Reservations

Many people make reservations on-line, so hearing is not an issue. If you're making reservations over the phone:

- Let the agent know you have a hearing loss.
- Repeat the information to confirm the details.
- Ask for a *written* confirmation.

Before your trip

- Come in for a check-up on your hearing aids before your trip.
- Pack a dri-aid kit or other durable container to protect your hearing aids.
- Consider carrying a spare set of hearing aids, just in case.

During your trip

- Public announcements can be difficult to understand. Look for video screens that post information on gates and departure times.
- Consider letting the boarding gate agent know you have a hearing loss.

Hotels

- Most hotels and cruise ships provide assistive devices, including smoke and fire alarms.
- Let someone at the front desk know you have a hearing loss in case of emergency.
- Television sets usually have built-in captioning that can be turned on.

The New York Times on Hearing Loss—Again

New York Times health columnist Jane Brody once described hearing loss as "a hidden disability, often not obvious to others or even to those who have it."

Brody discussed studies that found persons with untreated hearing loss "are likely to become frustrated and socially isolated. That isolation has been linked to depression."

In a recent *New York Times* article, Katherine Bouton, who has a significant hearing loss, discussed the relationship between hearing loss and dementia. Although the cause of the increased risk of dementia is not clear, one possible cause is the *social isolation* caused by untreated hearing loss.

Another possible cause is "overload" of brain function. When words are difficult to understand, the brain has to spend energy and effort to analyze and interpret the message, possibly at the expense of other brain function.

Hearing Aids

The author asked whether hearing aids can reduce the risk of dementia for people with hearing loss. Research has already shown that hearing aids reduce the *social isolation*, *depression* and *anxiety* caused by untreated loss.

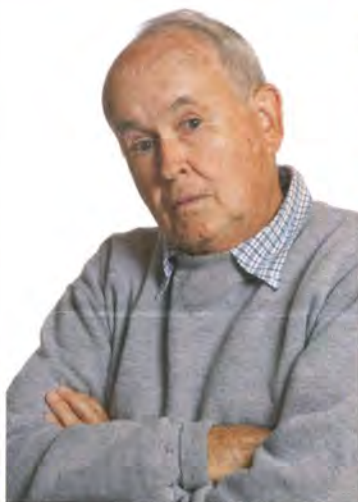
Another study found that "amplification reduces the effort spent on listening by people with hearing loss," which should reduce the demands placed on the brain.

One small study investigated hearing aid use and mental ability in older adults. The group with hearing loss that used hearing aids had similar results on an intelligence test as the normal hearing group. The group with hearing loss who did *not* use hearing aids had significantly lower scores.

It is reasonable to believe that since hearing aids reduce both the social isolation and mental strain caused by "effortful listening," hearing aids should reduce or eliminate the effects of hearing loss on mental function. More research is needed since this is a very important

Do hearing aids reduce the risk of dementia?

question. Reducing cognitive decline and delaying the onset of dementia even slightly could lead to billions of dollars in health care savings and improve the quality of life for millions of adults.



Suggestions for Family and Friends

Most people don't understand what it's like to have a hearing loss. Even if they want to be helpful, people who have normal hearing can't know what it's like to hear but not understand, or to hear well in one situation but not in another.

Here is a list of suggestions to discuss with the people around you.

Be polite. It's good courtesy to get my attention before talking to me—and I hear better! Getting my attention allows me to "get ready" to listen.

Be in the same room. Please don't speak to me from another room. It's simply *too difficult* when you're far away and out of sight. I may hear you call me...but don't expect me to understand what you say!

Don't talk fast. I often have to "figure out" what someone said. I simply can't

keep up with a fast talker. One of my most important tips: *slow down!*

Face me. Even if I'm not trying to "lipread," I understand more easily if I can see your face. And please don't chew gum, smoke, or cover your mouth while you're speaking—it makes lipreading much more difficult.

Come closer. When you stand a little closer, your voice is significantly louder and lipreading is much easier. Someone only three feet away is probably twice as easy to understand as someone eight feet away.

Reduce background noise. Noise interferes with my hearing more than it does for other people. If you want to speak with me, please turn off the television, radio or air conditioner. Please understand that hearing in noise

is *much* harder for me than it is for you! **Just because I heard you doesn't mean I understood you.** Hearing is not the same as *understanding*. That's why people with accents and people who mumble or talk fast are so difficult for me. I *hear* them...I just don't *understand* them.

Show these suggestions to your family and friends. This information and a little effort could make your life—and their lives—much easier.

Battery Tip: Let your hearing aid batteries sit for about a minute after removing the tab before putting them into your hearing aids. This allows air to fully charge the batteries (yes, they run on air!).

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.

Has My Hearing Gotten Worse?

One of the most common complaints we hear when someone comes in for a hearing check-up is, "I think my hearing has gotten worse."

The audiologic examination usually finds little or no change in hearing. To be more precise, however, we should say, "no significant change in hearing sensitivity and understanding for words in quiet."

Can your hearing change even if hearing sensitivity remains the same?

The central auditory system

Although it is our ears that *hear* the sounds around us, it is our auditory nervous system—especially the brain—that allows us to *understand* that sound. Researchers have found increasing evidence of age-related changes in this auditory system, changes

that are independent of any loss of hearing sensitivity. These changes include a slowing of the speed at which the nerves transmit signals. In other words, it's not only our ears—it's also our brain.

As we get older, there are changes in hearing in addition to any change in sensitivity that occurs in the ear itself.

As a result, older adults don't do as well in difficult listening situations when compared to younger individuals with similar hearing sensitivity. An older adult may complain of having difficulty in noisy conditions *even if he or she has normal hearing sensitivity.*

As we follow someone's hearing over 10 or 15 years, it is not unusual for that person to complain of increasing difficulties in noisy situations even when hearing sensitivity and ability to understand speech in quiet are unchanged.

The role of hearing aids

Aging can affect hearing in ways other than a simple change in hearing sensitivity. Hearing aids may reduce or minimize these effects by stimulating the auditory system. Other communication strategies, such as lipreading and avoiding noisy restaurants, are also helpful. But as important and as helpful as hearing aids are, it is important to remember that hearing aids do not correct or cure these changes to the auditory nerve system.

Announcements!

Hillcrest Hearing & Balance Center has always had an exceptional team of professionals dedicated to providing the best hearing care in this region. Our business manager **Terry Stivers**, is retiring after 27 years of devoted service. We wish her and her husband Steve, the best in the years ahead! We welcome **Mary Hetzel**, whose experience in health care ensures that Hillcrest continues its nearly 50 year tradition as the "gold standard" practice for all your hearing health care needs.

Congratulations to audiologist, **Dr. Maryann Heider**, who received her Doctor of Audiology degree in March from A.T. Still University, Arizona School Health Sciences.

You'll notice our name has been changed to "Hearing & Balance Center." This is to emphasize that we offer comprehensive hearing and balance care services to our communities. Our motto is "Better Hearing for a Better Life."

Sincerely,

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

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