

New Hearing Beginnings

By Linda Bilodeau

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Most of us welcome in the new year with church bells ringing, balls dropping, or with fireworks splashing across the winter sky. I am always sad to see the end-of-the-year holidays come to a close. But with the break of dawn on January 2, I know it's time to start afresh. Certainly, that includes some thinking about how to hear better.

I've suffered from hearing loss for most of my life. It took seven years after my initial diagnosis of hearing loss before I accepted the need for hearing aids. But once I started wearing aids, I saw the benefits. Through the years, I updated my hearing devices and peripherals. I am now wearing made-for-iPhone aids with artificial intelligence. All of the major hearing aid manufacturers carry these devices. If you are looking at upgrading your aids in 2021, I recommend trying a pair. Your audiologist can help you sort through the maze of offerings and options.

I am a huge fan of peripheral devices. I have a mini mic, which I use when out and about. This device has been a godsend when dealing with people wearing masks. My device is equipped with a setting, which allows me to subtract background noise. Most hearing aid manufacturers sell these devices. Again, your best bet is to talk to your audiologist because mini mics are not compatible with every hearing aid on the market. You need to find the mini mic and other peripherals that work with your aids.

Two years ago, I chose to install a hearing loop in my family room. Prior to that I was using a television adapter. Adapters run between \$300.00 to \$400.00 dollars. As is the case with mini mics, you have to upgrade an adapter when you change hearing aids. Home installed hearing loops work with any aids that have a t-coil. Hearing loops can be purchased on Amazon. I'm told they are easy to install. I chose to have a local company install mine. The cost of a loop varies depending on the size of the room covered. Usually, you can self-install a loop for the same

cost as an adapter. A company may charge between \$400.00 to \$1,000.00 dollars to install it for you. Some people loop every room in their homes, which allows them to hear music or conversation when friends or family arrive.

My audiologist has always said that you can improve your word recognition scores by wearing your aids all day, every day. He also recommends listening to podcasts, and using rehab programs such as Lace and Angel Words. If you are a cochlear implant recipient, you spent time with rehab programs. However, the use of rehab programs for hearing aid wearers is not common. Yet, my audiologist encourages me to do it. My Made-for-iPhone hearing aids allow me to pair them directly to my iPad. I spend a few hours a day listening to podcasts or books on tape. I try to do so without captioning, which forces me to pay attention to what is being said.

My audiologist encourages me to socialize. Many with hearing loss prefer the quiet of their homes. However, we are social beings and to help prevent dementia and depression, it is good for us to get together with friends and family. Unfortunately, the current pandemic halted our social lives. Some of us have turned to Zoom and other such apps. Do what you can to socialize until a vaccine is available.

As we welcome 2021, think of how you can hear better. Perhaps the best way to start is to accept that you have a hearing problem. Accepting frees us to treat our hearing loss. Find a qualified and caring audiologist and choose the best devices you can afford. Recognize that you will not hear normally even with top-of-the-line aids and implants. Know that it will take 2 to 6 months to get used to new devices. Consider using peripheral devices to fill in the hearing blanks. From there, take in a big deep breath and go out with friends or family. Use technology to help you socialize. Develop your own tips and tricks to make your hearing life easier. Then sit back and smile knowing you will have a happy hearing year.