

Have you Heard? A Listening Project
Season 2 Episode #1 – Exploring and Accepting Your Hearing Loss
Hosts: Betsy and Jamie

(0:02) Betsy: Hello 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 suspect you have a hearing loss this podcast is for you. Today we’re going to discuss the beginning steps of hearing loss journey. How does someone know if they have hearing loss and if someone thinks they have hearing loss, what can be done about it? We’re pleased to have you join us today. I’m Betsy, I’m one of your hosts and today I’m also joined by Jamie. We both work together at OEI as hearing health advocates.

(0:43) Jamie: Hi Bets, it’s great to be with you today.

(0:46) Betsy: Oh, me too, welcome. Shall we dive right into the topic today?

(0:53) Jamie: Let’s do it!

(0:54) Well, believe it or not according to the Hearing Loss Association as well as the Journal of the American Geriatric Society, it takes the average person seven to ten years to admit that they have a hearing loss and want to do something about it. So, we do everything we can to think of or act like what’s normal and not show some sign of aging because we just don’t want to feel somehow less capable than others.

(1:22) Jamie: That’s right! And you know, you see people trying different tactics to not, you know, give away their hearing loss. Like I see people, you know, you lean over to someone so your ear is just subtly closer to their mouth or if you’re trying to ask somebody over and over again, what did you say? People try to change those words up. So instead of saying like what, what, what it was I didn’t catch that or can you try that again? You know in group settings to nodding your head in agreement. Even if you didn’t hear a word someone says, I see that a lot and I think it can feel embarrassing, you know, if you find yourself doing these things (Betsy...yeah) chances are you have a hearing loss that needs to be addressed.

(2:04) Betsy: Yeah, what are other clues such as, do you experience listening fatigue? Apparently, there is such a thing. I had not even thought about that before. Listening fatigue is like having to solve a puzzle to understand what

others are saying which requires concentrating to hear and then to comprehend. Do you find yourself unable to understand someone if you can't see their lips? The recent pandemic and proliferation of mask wearing made that extremely evident for a lot of people, that alone can create tension and be exhausting.

(2:38) Jamie: It can. Listening fatigue is real and you know other signs can be increased stress in that, you know, you seemed to have low energy or you're irritable. You're not performing well at work or maybe even school. I think other people, you know, notice struggling in a crowd trying to hear things in a group conversation (Betsy...yeah) and, you know, even difficulty hearing over the phone, you know, these are all common symptoms.

(3:06) Betsy: Yeah, I get that. I know this sounds like a long list, no wonder you want to deny it all, it is, I get it. It's exhausting to deny something that is happening, really happening and is tiring to keep feeling out of touch, you know, behind in the conversation or unsure of what's being said in the conversation, especially in a crowd or group setting, I know that, or just one on one sometimes depending on how that person speaks. So, what should you do if you suspect that you have a hearing loss? Well first thing, schedule a hearing test with the specialist and honestly, this is something you should do yearly. Once you get past the age of 50, I mean just like you do for the rest of your body a yearly check up with a general practitioner going to the ophthalmologist, regular teeth cleaning, etc., you know, a hearing screening on its own is almost always at no charge which is kind of a perk, yeah.

(4:07) Jamie: And, is it unbelievable that people don't think to get a yearly hearing screening? I mean, I'm just thinking about that, as you talked about, we get yearly checkups, we get physicals, (Betsy...yeah) we get our teeth cleaned, we get our vision checked and then, you know, I don't, I feel like growing up I didn't hear my parents or my grandparents talk about the yearly hearing tests (Betsy...I didn't either) I wonder why that got omitted, it's clearly just part of regular maintenance (Betsy...you're so right about that) Yeah, so, so tell us Bets, so where, so where do people actually go for the hearing screenings?

(4:41) Betsy: Well, it's actually pretty easy to find a place. There's some local, you can Google local audiologists' offices, hearing aid dispensers, hearing health centers or ask someone you know, who has hearing loss and knows if someone they could recommend.

(4:57) Jamie: Yes, So I think that's good to remind people because some people might not be even familiar with audiologists. There's also hearing aid specialists and hearing aid dispensers so somebody licensed I think it's probably the way to go (Betsy...good point, good point) get your hearing tested, yeah, somewhere

where somebody's credentialed to do that and the reason it's on my mind is, I actually had my hearing tested recently (Betsy...aha) and it was easy and it was quick and definitely painless and here's how it worked for me. They, they had me go into what looked like a little phone booth and it had a chair and I sat down and they had me wear headphones, the kind that go over your ears not earbuds and they played different sounds and they played the sounds one ear at a time and they had me raise my hand whenever I heard the sounds and then they also read out loud different words and then I had to identify which word they had just said and literally that was it. It was, it was very, you know, it reminded me of what they did when we did test our hearing in elementary school (Betsy...yeah) so luckily my head, yeah, you remember, right? (Betsy...I do now that I'm thinking about it) the nurse's office you just raise your hand and there be 25 people outside waiting for their turn, yeah, it was very much like, it was just that I was by myself in the little phone booth. So, and then I learned that it's a good idea to ask for a copy of my audiogram and that shows me the softest sounds I could hear at different pitches or frequencies and the closer the marks are to the top of the graph the softer the sounds I could hear, so I can hang on to this audiogram and keep track of my own hearing and hopefully not lost but, you know, over time it probably will happen and so I can see when does marks start to drop or fall on that audiogram I'll know, you know, my hearing loss and where I started and then where it got to.

(7:04) Betsy: Wow, yeah, I had, I had my hearing tested too and I don't remember looking at the audiogram very much and now I'm rethinking about that but I do know that I lost the upper register decibels of my, of my hearing so that's something that I don't always hear so well up there and I'll talk about that another time. But anyway, yeah, I get it it's great you did that, and oh by the way, it is always a good idea to get a copy of the audiogram and save it even if you don't read it like me because then when you go for another hearing test at a later date you can compare and see if, if things are staying the same or getting worse. So I guess I have to say bite the bullet and get a hearing test that's the way to get the truth of the things get the lay of the land so you can explore options as to how to move forward and not let your hearing loss impact your life negatively.

(8:00) Jamie: Yeah, and I think what a lot of people don't realize is that if you have hearing loss it doesn't just affect you, you know, it, it's going to impact other people in your life especially, you know, if you live with family members or friends, so, you know, if you're thinking to yourself I don't need to do anything or I'm getting along fine enough, I would say think again because I know in my family, my grandfather specifically was just not even aware of what he was missing and how frustrating it was for us when we wanted to talk to him. So, if you're not even aware someone's trying to talk to you and you're missing all of that then you're probably not aware that people are frustrated around you, you know, and for my grandfather he had no idea that we were shouting, you know, so he thinks that

we're just talking normally and he's not noticing how hard I'm having to yell so that he can hear me and that is frustrating. I'm one of the family members that experienced that so I think, you know, don't just think about you think about your circle of people it impacts. it impacts everybody around you. And I heard a quote recently and I think it, it accurately sort of puts the picture into place for me and it's "when you have hearing loss it really takes a lot of those intimate moments from you" (Betsy...wow) and so I think, you know, by finding solutions to your hearing loss, you know, the world can open back up and I think people can be amazed at the difference. And again, I speak from experience with my own family my grandfather had no idea what he was missing so it's not until he got that all checked out and got hearing aids that he even became aware of what he was missing.

(9:45) Betsy: Well, he finally did, that's good that he did that, took some action (Jamie...took years) yeah. Okay, well I can relate I have a little story to tell, I had an episode with my mom one time that stays with me, I got so frustrated trying to communicate with her over the phone after I had moved to California but she was still living in Evanston, IL and she was living in an assisted living home and it was my birthday. So I called her to remind her that it was my birthday (Jamie...I love that you did that) yeah, I had to do that, I was out on the deck and she picked up but didn't have her hearing aids in so when I told her it was my birthday she said it's not my birthday and I tried again only with a louder voice in a slower voice but she kept saying, it's not my birthday sweetheart (Jamie...oooh) I was so frustrated so I screamed over the phone and said I know it's my birthday and then I broke into tears it was terrible I was so frustrated. So, I pulled myself together and I directed her loudly to hang up the phone so I could call the nurse's station to go into her room and put my mom's hearing aids in for her and then turn them on. So, I waited a little bit and I called her back so we could communicate on my birthday without screaming. I laugh about that now but I sure wish she had had our CapTel Captioned phone in those days.

(11:24) Jamie: I bet and, you know, that's even just one small example it's like, look at how many steps you had to go through because you weren't physically there. You're not just relying on you mom it's like, in this kind of situation you have to call the people the facility they have to go into her room, they have to find the hearing aids have to put the hearing aids in so it's a lot for something, you know, in quotes so simple that you wanted to communicate which was and I don't know, I think it's such a good example because it's like, it's literally difference between it's your birthday or her birthday, right? (Betsy...yeah) it's like one word difference and that changes the entire context of what you're talking about.

(12:04) Betsy: I'm so glad you get that because that's exactly what happened. Yeah, and it's like, here I am in California and she's in Evanston I can't like drop

over I can't just drive over there and do it myself so I was dependent on the nurse's station, so yeah.

(12:18) Jamie: And we talk about hearing loss affecting other people I mean obviously it's affecting your conversation, it's like but now you go to pull these other people in that, you know, are working at the facility. So, it's just and again, the fascinating part is like that's for one word. So, I think about people I know that it's like if you're missing more than one word, you just, you can't imagine the context of what was really trying to be communicated to you. It's so, so important to, to address these things.

(12:45) Betsy: Yeah, that reminds me of the intimate moments things that you were talking about missing those intimate moments because it just that one little thing, one little sound, one word.

(12:55) Jamie...yeah, one word and now we'll take a quick break to hear a word from one of our sponsors.

*** Commercial....My mom and I used to talk on the phone everyday but lately she can't hear me when I call. I have to repeat myself over and over it's so frustrating but I know it's even more frustrating for mom. Thankfully we got her a CapTel Captioned Telephone it's just like the captions you see on TV only for phone calls. Now if she can't hear what I say she can read the captions. Our local CapTel outreach person took care of everything, it was so easy. We're back to talking every day and it means the world to me and to my mom. If someone you know can't hear over the phone, we can help you get a CapTel phone at no cost visit oeius.org for details.

(13:49) Betsy: Welcome back! Okay, well moving on, so what happens if you have untreated hearing loss? Hearing is a brain activity; your ears receive sound but it's the brain that makes sense of it and I really didn't get this until recently. So, here's how your hearing loss and brain health are connected. Jamie, do you want to start us off with that?

(14:14) Jamie: Sure, sure. So, so hearing loss causes sensory deprivation and there's an auditory part of our brains that need sound and it needs sound stimulation in order to stay sharp. So even mild hearing loss that's under stimulating that part of the brain and so it's that, you know, that phrase we all here tossed around use it or lose it, it applies in hearing loss as well so if hearing loss is left untreated these auditory pathways, they can atrophy because they're not being used and if it atrophies then you're losing that ability and it's

diminishing and diminishing and then eventually it can just completely go.

(15:00) Betsy: Well, it just gets you to exercise your brain then, I mean that's, that's exactly it is, it's a matter of exercising your brain like you do your body. For instance, playing word games, reading or learning to speak a new language even or challenging yourself to memorize lyrics to a song, I love that. I read recently again in an article about this very thing, that challenging yourself to practice or exercise your brain by doing something you love works better because you want to keep doing it regardless of what it is, we need to challenge our brain and trying anything we can to keep things active in there.

(15:42) Jamie: Yeah, so it's definitely about, you know, exercising or brains but it is also about making sure we address hearing loss early when we notice it so that those auditory pathways stay stimulated in the ways that they need to, you know, when you, when people have hearing loss the brain has to work harder to process sounds and then that creates fatigue and then, you know, I think you mentioned the phrase earlier "concentrating to comprehend" and so then now you're exhausted, you were trying to hear something, then you're trying to hear it so then you hear it but then you have to take a minute to think about what it actually meant and it's like, you know, I watch people go through that in my own family and it's like, wow, that was pretty exhausting to just get that one sentence of what somebody said. So, there's that part of it and then also, you know, hearing loss can affect our sharpness or lack of it. I know the "D" word as I call it dementia is very scary for people to think about and there's research now that shows we are more likely to lose memory or at least alertness if we don't tend to our hearing loss and get help.

(16:57) Betsy: Yeah, yeah, I didn't realize how hearing loss affects so much that we've taken for granted. Like balance who knew (Jamie...yeah) that would be affected, I mean who knew hearing loss cause this balance issues. So more than ever it's crucial to take notice and start or continue exercising. Exercising it's such a wonderful to work in maintaining your balance, I mean, walking is crucial doing stretches, strengthening your core, I never knew I had a core so that took me a while to learn that but I said, what core (Jamie: I'm still looking for my core) yeah, I think it's in there somewhere, it's supposed to get flatter and hard in there but anyway it does help with the balance. I know that has from experience. So, and even simple chair yoga exercises can help.

(17:48) Jamie: Yeah, I mean, when you talk about exercise and people can't see me but Betsy and I are polar opposites, I'm a big boy and I'm tall and Betsy is short and very thin and so you know, exercise even in simplest forms for me has made a difference. I'm somebody that's unbalanced so I like you Betsy mentioning, you know, it can be things like walking or if you sit in the chair and

you do some stretching it's like anything to, to move your body and to move those muscles helps your core and then eventually helps your balance (Betsy... yeah) and then there's one other, oh go ahead.

(18:23) Betsy: I was going to say, walking is also crucial for your brain, I've been told (Jamie...yes) I won't quote anyone and I know that's the truth and that's why I'm walking so my brain will get better.

(18:36) Jamie...yeah, me too and the other thing too, hearing loss and sleep, this one I learned recently there is a connection between hearing loss and sleep and between seven and nine hours of sleep apparently helps prevent hearing loss. So, people who have poor sleeping habits i.e., myself I'll have to work on that, there are problems people have with hearing in the long term due to lack of sleep.

(19:09) Betsy: Oh my gosh, yeah, I did not know that either. Well, we're learning something new every day here, aren't we? So, when you have hearing loss there are so many solutions to help you cope and overcome your challenges, that's the truth of it. We know how reluctant people are to accept their hearing loss but acceptance is the key to navigating your way through all this stuff because it's new and, and in previous podcasts we've had said, we talked about how important it is to be your own advocate so this is what we're talking about. If some medical doctors don't ask about your hearing or seem concerned, you know what, you, you know what your experiencing inside your own heads so be proactive and seek out specialists as we mentioned before.

(19:57) Jamie: Yeah, I know one of our teammates, she knew she had some form of hearing loss because it runs in her family and she was reluctant to do anything about it and finally at age 50 she went in for a hearing test and the audiologist that tested her with someone she had known for many years and after the test he told her, he had no idea that her hearing loss was so bad and it turned out that she had like moderate to severe hearing loss. So obviously, she was, she was finding ways to navigate through life and to try not to make her hearing loss noticeable but this audiologist suggested that she definitely try hearing aids and after she tried them for a few weeks she was hooked and now she says she doesn't know why she waited so long to get them (Betsy...oh I love that story, I know who that is) I bet you do.

(20:55) Betsy: I do, I know. So anyway, well here's the thing we have taken this first episode of our second season to start a conversation about hearing loss and what to make of it and we will be discovering more continuing on this season of Have you heard? A listening project. We'll explore different hearing loss solutions in more depth. So, we've talked about a little bit we're going to go deeper with

that with more details. Next time we're going to delve into how to adjust your patterns, thoughts and habits to your newly acknowledged circumstances so I hope you'll join us for that.

(21:32) Jamie: Yes, you should definitely join us for that because if I'm not mistaken Betsy, I think you're telling your story in the next episode (Betsy...Yes, I am) yes so people stay tuned you don't want to miss that it's going to be an exciting season we're happy to be having you, that's nice, we're happy to have you join us again.

(21:53) Betsy: Yes, so please do it. In the meantime, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out and thank you to everyone who's joined us today and thank you Jamie.

(22:06) Jamie: Thank you Betsy and I'm exciting to hear your story next time.

(22:08) Betsy: Okay, I hope it's interesting. Well, anyway, it will be. So, for more information on hearing health resources be sure to visit us at oeius.org, that's oeius.org. I'm Betsy (and I'm Jamie) and we want to thank all our listeners for joining us today on the Have You Heard? podcast and remember to stay safe and stay connected.

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