

Aural Rehabilitation: More than Just Lip Reading

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Okay. You have that brand new pair of hearing aids, you wear them everyday, but you still do not hear as well as you want. Now what?

Before you run to your audiologist to get your money back, you have to understand what hearing aids can and cannot do. All hearing aids make sounds louder and, hopefully, clearer. They cannot eliminate background noise, and they cannot make you hear perfectly overnight. Better hearing takes time. Here is why. Your ears may be the sound receivers, but your brain is really doing the "hearing." With a hearing loss, your brain has slowly lost its ability to process properly. Getting hearing aids is the first step in hearing better. Your next step is a program that will train your brain to understand all these new sounds. That is where Aural Rehabilitation comes in.

Aural Rehabilitation is learning to listen again by using residual hearing, hearing aids, and compensatory techniques. Compensatory techniques include communication strategies, environmental cues, environmental manipulation, speechreading, and *anything that helps!* In a complete program, you will learn to know your hearing loss and hearing aid, know which situations present difficulty and which do not, and develop communication strategies. A good program also includes some type of counseling to help you overcome your difficulties and accept your limitations.

What are some communication strategies? First, learn what environmental factors make it easiest to hear and see. For example, in a restaurant, do not sit near the kitchen or a bus station, try to go when it is not so crowded, and stay away from noise sources such as a piano or band. Next, you will develop linguistic and cognitive skills. You learn to focus on main ideas and concepts, not individual words. You will also learn how to anticipate what can, and will, be said by preparing words and sentences ahead of time and making use of situation cues.

You will also learn repair strategies. Even after all your preparation, you still may have some problems understanding the conversation. That is when you use repair strategies. Some repair strategies are: repeating, rephrasing, summarizing, and asking the right questions.

A major part of any aural rehabilitation program is Speechreading. Speechreading is a lot more than just lip-reading. Speechreading training provides formal instruction in how speech sounds are made, and which sounds look alike on the lips. Learning which words have the same mouth movement but very different meaning can be incredibly useful in increasing understanding of conversations.

Speechreading also trains you to fill in the missing words by using your knowledge of the language and by using visual clues. Facial expressions, gestures, body movement, and body language all contribute to the overall meaning of the spoken word. Broader observation of factors like the physical environment, the context of the conversation, and the people involved is also helpful in gaining information about what was said or what might likely be said next.

Finally, counseling is an important part in any aural rehab plan. Counseling provides you with enhanced understanding of hearing loss and its impact, greater knowledge about managing communication difficulties, reduced stress and discouragement, increased motivation to minimize listening difficulties and stronger compliance with amplification and aural rehabilitation plans.

With your hearing aids and an effective aural rehabilitation program, you will develop a positive attitude and learn to love communication again. And remember, you will make mistakes no matter what. So never be afraid to laugh at yourself.



Dr. Jacobster is an ASHA Certified Audiologist with over 25 years experience in all aspects of audiological evaluation, hearing aid dispensing and rehabilitation for hearing loss. For information on any of her programs or services, you may contact her at (845) 395-0300 or e-mail at hearingarts@aol.com.