

New technology changes hearing aids — and lives

For years, retired elementary school principal Kevin Austin needed hearing aids but avoided them. Finally he got his first pair four years ago.

“My wife and I went to an RPO concert and when they played their second piece, Aaron Copland’s ‘Fanfare for the Common Man’ with its amazing brass, tears started streaming down my face,” says Austin, of Canandaigua. “For 10 years, I had forgotten that music has layers and there’s motion in the notes. All those years, I had been missing this. Hearing aids changed that for me.”

For Melody Delfs, the turning point was a realization that her worsening hearing loss was limiting her life.

“I got to the point where I was avoiding socializing in public, doing things like entertaining at home instead of going to a restaurant with friends,” says Delfs, a small business owner in Canandaigua. “I thought, ‘This is crazy. I need to reevaluate hearing aids.’”

Delfs had tried a pair eight years ago but rejected them. “They didn’t seem like enough of an improvement,” she says. When her hearing got worse, she hoped the technology had improved.

It had. Dramatically.

Today, Delfs and Austin both use sophisticated hearing aids by ReSound, the first company in the industry to partner with Apple to create iPhone-compatible hearing aids. Austin paired his ReSound LiNX² hearing aids with an app on his iPhone that sends calls, music and other audio from his phone directly to his hearing aids.

The app also lets him adjust the volume, bass and treble, bringing him better hearing and more control over the sound.

“You can also add pre-sets for certain audio environments like restaurants and concert halls so that all you do is tap an icon and your hearing aids adjust to that environment automatically,” Austin says.

He adds that the company where he got his hearing aids, Clifton Springs Hearing Center, can create those pre-sets. “So I’m going back there and asking them to add one for church, too.”

John Salisbury, a licensed doctor of audiology and president of Clifton Springs Hearing Center, says that an important side benefit of this kind of smart technology is that it encourages people who have avoided hearing aids to try them. That describes Austin and the 80 percent of people in his age group who need hearing aids but have avoided them.

“People are now realizing that hearing aids aren’t old-fashioned anymore,” Dr. Salisbury says. “So many have a smartphone in their hands already — why not use that technology to improve their hearing in a way that will also improve their quality of life?”

As for those who might be intimidated by technology, Salisbury points out that the smartphone app is an add-on, not an essential component.

“You can still make adjustments on the ear piece itself. You don’t need it paired with the app on your phone,” he says.

Delfs is one who benefits from improved audio quality without linking her hearing aids to her smartphone.

Austin’s only regret is that he didn’t get hearing assistance sooner.

“Your quality of life can be improved by getting the help that people sometimes refuse to believe they need,” he says. “I was missing things I didn’t even know I was missing. This has been a huge improvement for me.”

For more information about advances in hearing aids, visit the products page on the Clifton Springs Hearing Center website.



◀ John R. Salisbury, Au.D

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