

NEWS

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FEATURE ARTICLE:

S P E E C H R E A D I N G



In the past people spoke of “lipreading.” The term these days isn’t “lipreading,” but rather “speechreading.” The change has come because we are really looking at people’s facial expressions, arm gestures, postures, etc. and not just their lips when interpreting what is being said.

None of us has much formal training in speechreading, but many people do it to some extent. Speech reading is essential in two instances: in noisy places all people speechread regardless of their hearing status and people with hearing loss speechread on many occasions, noisy or not.

The following are some tips and activities for you to improve your speechreading abilities. In order to be able to speech read, we have to

be able to SEE the person who is talking. I know this sounds elementary but is much harder to communicate with a person who is standing in another room, talking with their back turned or talking while covering their mouth with a hand. If you cannot see the person who is talking, you will have to use some assertiveness to explain, “I have a much easier time understanding you if you face me (or remove your hand from your mouth, etc.)”

You also want to make sure that you are looking at a person’s lips. I know I told you above that you are speechreading, not lipreading but facial expressions and gestures are fairly easy to see while lip movements are fleeting. You will need to concentrate on a person’s lips to catch the details.

If you want to practice your skills, get a partner to mouth words to you. Start with a

closed set of words like days of the week. When that becomes easy move to a larger set like months in the year or street names in your community.

Some people will be easier to speechread than others. If you have a good friend or family member who speaks without moving their lips much or who often speaks while smiling (very difficult to speechread!) then it might be worth it to explain that you need them to use more lip movement when talking to you. They may or may not be able to change a habit that has lasted a lifetime.

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Valley AUDIOLOGY

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SPEECHREADING

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Your most important tool in speechreading is your hearing aids. Many sounds of our language are invisible on the lips. For example, say the word “key” out loud. You don’t move your lips at all to say the word. By using your hearing you can understand speech best.

Finally, I will encourage you to practice this skill. Have your partner select an article from the newspaper and tell you the subject. They read a sentence in their regular speaking voice and you repeat it. If you are unable to repeat the whole sentence then have your partner read it again in the same voice. If you are still unable to get it, then your partner repeats while emphasizing the words you missed. To make this exercise harder, turn on the radio or TV in the background.

Your hearing aids and your speechreading abilities will help you hear *most* people in *most* situations. We have to be realistic that we won’t hear everyone all the time. If you find you are missing out on too much, make an appointment to see your audiologist.

BENEFITS OF BINAURAL AMPLIFICATION

Many years ago it was common for people to be fit with one hearing aid even if they had loss in both ears. Then in the 1980’s a study came out of the Veteran’s Administration showing the unaided ear loses its ability to discriminate speech likely due to auditory deprivation. Today two hearing aids (also called “binaural”) is the standard of care.

In addition to avoiding auditory deprivation, there are other strong reasons for wearing aids on both ears. Better understanding of speech both in quiet and in background noise is possible when wearing two aids instead of one. Our brain is wired to hear from both sides and can do so most effectively with two aids. Also, in order to truly localize where a sound is coming from we must hear equally on each

side. Finally, with two hearing aids one can get better, smoother sound quality. When wearing only one aid, often that aid has to be turned up quite a bit in volume for you to hear. When you add a second aid each can be set at a more moderate volume allowing for better sound quality and less feedback.

But don’t take my word for it. This is taken directly from a happy patient’s testimonial: “It’s been about six months ago that you fitted me with my second Phonak hearing aid.... I wanted to tell you how it has improved the quality of my life. Now with, practically invisible hearing aids in both ears, it’s like going from black-and-white television to living color!”

Not everyone can or should wear two aids but most people should. If you aren’t wearing two aids, ask your audiologist if you should be.

"Blindness separates us from things but deafness separates us from people." Helen Keller

Answering Machine with Slow Speech

Understanding the name and phone number of a caller is very difficult for hearing impaired people. My patients also say that it is very difficult to understand information left on their answering machines. If only people would speak more slowly!

Now there is a solution to that problem - an answering machine that will play back in a slower speed. The ClearSounds ANS3000 Digital Amplified Answering Machine with Slow Speech sells for around \$60 and has the following features:

- * 30dB adjustable amplification
- * 3 selectable speed levels
- * Big, easy to read buttons
- * 30 minutes of recording time
- * Remote access so a family member can call in and listen to those messages that you still can't quite get.

You can order this device through a company called Hitec online at their website - www.hitec.com. Click on ClearSounds Signature Line in the left column and you will see the ANS3000.

WHAT IS THE STORY WITH "FREE" HEARING TESTS?

More than once I've had to answer the question of why we bill insurance for hearing tests when other places do it for free.

As audiologists, our license allows us to do full diagnostic hearing testing to evaluate the type and degree of hearing loss. We use several different tests to give a complete picture of your hearing status and we often write a report to your primary care doctor so that the results can be part of your medical record.

To be licensed in the state of California to practice audiology, new audiologists have to have a doctoral degree, to have passed a national exam and to have worked for a year under a currently licensed audiologist.

This training teaches us to give these comprehensive evaluations to diagnose and

treat certain types of hearing loss. If we see a medical issue, we refer you to your physician.

Places that give "free" hearing tests are doing a much smaller amount of testing for the purposes of fitting a hearing aid only. These tests can be considered a screening tool for hearing loss vs. a diagnostic evaluation.

Because we are being reimbursed for our testing services, we don't have to count on the sale of hearing aids as our only revenue. Make no mistake, we at Valley Audiology think hearing aids can and do work well and we recommend them often when we diagnose hearing loss, but we don't have the need to "make the sale" in order to keep the office running.

Valley Audiology Website Has a New Look

New Widex Aid?

A number of you are patiently waiting for the arrival of the new hearing aid by Widex. Their current aid and their yet to be released aid have the Zen feature for relaxation and relief from tinnitus symptoms. Because the aids can generate noise, they are in a different category from other traditional hearing aids. Therefore, they are subject to FDA approval before they can be sold in the United States. They are being fit successfully around the world and we expect them to get FDA approval shortly. You'll be the first to know when we have them on the shelf.

Well, I suppose it doesn't look entirely different, but we've tried to add some features to make it more useful.

Now patients can download forms, fill them out on their computer and print them up before coming in. Our newsletter will be posted on the site for friends and family members to read. And, I've started my own blog. In the blog you will find announcements, answers to frequently asked questions and other educational tidbits.

I'm excited to say that I've had some family members of

patients write to me using the contact form on the site. I'm thrilled to educate and communicate online.

We've also added a section with comments from patients. If you want your two cents added, ask us for a testimonial form and we can add you to the site.

If you would like to see something added to our site, please let us know. We are always looking for ways that Valley Audiology can give the best possible service to our patients.



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