

My Cochlear Implant Experience

By: Judy Taub

A Cochlear Implant (CI) was not an option for me... at least that is what I thought until the latest "state of the art" digital hearing aid would not work for me. What little hearing I had left was slowly deteriorating as well. Even the most advanced hearing aid could not help me. It was becoming increasingly difficult to communicate. What was I to do now?

After much encouragement from my family and friends, especially my SHHH friends, I made an appointment with the University of Michigan Cochlear Implant Group for an evaluation. Candidates for the CI have to score below 40% in a speech comprehension test, without lip reading. My score was 12%, which made me an excellent candidate by their standards. However, there was one catch: the CI is normally recommended for the worst ear. In my case, since I had never worn a hearing aid in that ear, the chances for success were not good. Consequently the only choice was to have the CI in the better ear. I was very nervous to say the least as is the case of any surgery. What if it wasn't successful? If the CI didn't work, then I would be totally deaf!

The CI destroys all residual hearing which means that a hearing aid can never be worn again. Based on the results of all my tests, the CT scan and my good lip reading skills, both the surgeon and the audiologist were very optimistic about the success of the CI. What a decision to make! It was one of the most difficult decisions I ever made. But after several weeks of deliberation and anxiety, I decided to go for it. The rest was easy.

Following the surgery, there was no pain and the dizziness lasted only a few days. A week later, I was back at work. After one month of living in complete silence, the CI was activated. My first impression was "What a noisy world we live it!" It was totally mind boggling. I was hearing sounds I had never heard before such as birds' ~ chirping, cars honking, the wind blowing, phones ringing and sirens blaring. Even though it becomes overwhelming at times, I love being a part of this noisy world that had always been denied me. Speech is much more distinct, which makes lip reading easier.

Progress is slower than I hoped in the area of speech comprehension without lip reading. Talking on the phone is still difficult but it continues to improve as time passes. I practice listening to tapes. This is a totally new learning experience for me, like being born again. My husband claims I am hearing too much, especially when I keep telling him to speak more softly. This was definitely the right decision for me and I look forward to seeing more improvements in the future. I am just grateful to have been able to take advantage of such a marvelous scientific achievement.