

## HEARING!

**I**n a prior issue, I focused on gratitude for vision. Vision is a miraculous sense, and I would use the same descriptor for hearing. We have our hearing, thanks to the steady advances of DNA over millions of years, to favor the survival of animals with the ability to sense and respond to sound and the ability to communicate with sound.

Sound, like light, is wave energy with a range of frequencies, that can travel through air with a speed of 1,100 feet/second. A lightning strike, seen immediately, might take several seconds to reach our ears as thunder.

How do we hear? Sound is received by our outer ear and ear canal, and hits the eardrum, imparting vibrations to it. The ear drum transfers these vibrations to our inner ear, the cochlea. The cochlea is a snail shaped, water-filled structure that houses arrays of tiny hairs that receive and sort the vibrations. These vibrations are transduced into electrical signals, which travel via the cochlear nerve to the auditory cortex of the brain. The brain makes sense of them with magnificent computing power. Vision, hearing processing, and memory take up large portions of our brain.

Hearing is a wonderful part of our life experience. In infancy, our parents' voices are calming influences. We likely heard murmurings of these voices in utero. In childhood, hearing is a big part of learning, including language acquisition. We start enjoying music and singing and rhyming and animal sounds. ABCs and counting are heard and repeated. Children also like producing sounds. We gradually acquire language and conversation skills.

We appreciate the people who listen to us and respond to us. Listening is crucial to interpersonal relations. As we gain maturity, someone who listens well is very valuable. Being listened to,



with feedback that shows understanding, is uplifting to any relationship. Showing empathy binds us together.

We can take hearing for granted or take it with gratitude. We would miss hearing if we lost any part of it. How can we protect our precious hearing sense? Research has shown that nearly 1 in 4 adults in the US has some degree of hearing loss. This hearing loss is commonly caused by exposure to loud noise, which is measured in decibels. In general, noise that falls below 70 decibels does not harm our ears. Damage can occur when noise is above that level. A noise above 100 decibels causes immediate damage. A good rule of thumb is: if you have to shout to be heard by someone an arm's length away, you are being exposed to too much noise.

If you have significant ringing in your ears, or if you have noticed changes in your hearing acuity, it is wise to prevent further loss. A good recommendation is to get a hearing test by an Audiologist.

Some tips to prevent hearing loss are:

- Limit your exposure to loud noise.
- Wear hearing protection when involved in loud activities.
- Consider using snug-fitting earmuffs and/or earplugs especially when using loud power tools or lawn equipment. Special earmuffs are designed to be used with firearms.
- Limit the volume of the music that you listen to. Position yourself away from large amplifiers.

I admire good music of all kinds. I admire the communicative sounds of birds, mammals, and insects. I love the sound of running water. I admire verbal greetings and expressions of gratitude. I admire good conversation and praise.

In closing, our hearing is a gift of Nature and DNA passed on to us by our ancestors. It is a precious asset; it is a crucial part of interpersonal communication and acquisition of information and knowledge. It is often a source of joy. ■

— **Namaste!**

Dr. Shapiro is a career clinic physician who has utilized relaxation techniques with many of his patients. His YouTube channel is:



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