

Audiology Newsletter

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Issue 17

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Meniere's Disease (The Weekend Australian May 9-10 2009)

Meniere's disease can involve significant hearing loss, tinnitus and debilitating vertigo attacks. The attacks happen without warning. Because the hearing is so damaged sufferers will have trouble understanding speech and will suffer poor balance. Consequently, many people are unable to continue working. Anxiety about when vertigo might strike and having an attack in public render some sufferers housebound.

The underlying cause of Meniere's remains something of a mystery. Professor Gibson, Head of the Ear, Nose & Throat department at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, says "all we really know is that there is a buildup of fluid in the inner ear in Meniere's disease". There is no cure yet for Meniere's, only some treatments to reduce the symptoms. A discovery about the workings of the inner ear by researcher Daniel Brown may be a turning point for our understanding of Meniere's disease, says Gibson. Brown believes that in people with Meniere's disease the middle tube of the cochlea in the inner ear is so distended with fluid that it blocks the passage (helicotrema) that connects the three inner ear tubes. When the helicotrema is blocked, the pressure in the two outer tubes of the cochlea cannot equalise as it normally would. This makes the inner ear more sensitive to low frequency soundwaves and displaces hair cells in the inner ear. This displacement causes the hearing problems. Brown plans to explore the effects of helicotrema blockage on the vestibular system, responsible for balance.

Leisure Noise Exposure

Silence is a rare phenomenon in the modern world. How significant is **leisure** noise exposure? There is becoming a steadily increasing volume of literature regarding the amount of noise to which individuals are potentially exposed through their leisure activities over an average life-cycle.

Typically, the measurement parameter of sound is L_{Aeq} expressed in decibels (dB). The table below lists some indicative noise levels expected to be encountered during particular activities.

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>LOUDNESS L_{Aeq} (dB)</u>
Chain saw	105
Live band in pub	104
Portable grinder	100
Concert (indoor & outdoor)	100
Router	92
Aerobics / gym class	88
Classical concert	87
Jet aircraft passenger	78
Personal stereo (typical)	76
iPod / MP3 player (very loud)	capped at 120 dB in most countries

More important than the noise level is the *amount* of noise exposure that results from the *time* spent at the activity. In Australia, regulations state that a place of work is deemed to have a noise exposure hazard if the L_{Aeq} equals or exceeds 85 dB over an eight hour period ($L_{Aeq,8h}$).

Exposure to damaging noise is cumulative over a life time—whatever the source and regardless of whether it comes from work or from leisure.

A calculation for the Percentage Loss of Hearing (PLH) shows that after 40 years of exposure to the acceptable level of noise at work ($L_{Aeq,8h}$) of 85 dB, 85% of males can expect to experience an average PLH of 10%, and 51% of females can expect to experience an average PLH of 8%. This degree of hearing loss will impact on both social and working life. It also questions whether current standards should be considered 'safe'. Thus in response to the question 'how significant is leisure noise exposure over the life-cycle?' initial indications are that there is a potential problem and the effects of leisure noise need to be considered in more serious light.

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Alcohol & Hearing (London Ear Institute)

The more alcohol you drink, the less well you hear. "There are many theories why this happens," says Tahwinder Upile, honorary senior lecturer at the University College London Ear Institute. "Alcohol may affect processing in the hearing centre of the brain," he says. "Or it may also act as a dehydrating agent changing the chemical composition of the fluid in the ear." Alcohol-induced deafness wears off as the liquor leaves your system, but if, as your hearing fades throughout the evening, friends yell in your ear or you keep turning up the stereo, you may inflict more damage. Dr Upile suggests drinking plenty of water to counteract dehydration and if you're in a noisy pub or club, make sure you take regular noise breaks outside.

Watpac & Cochlear (The Australian, June 4, 2009)

CONSTRUCTION: Watpac has won an \$80 million contract to build a global headquarters and manufacturing facility for hearing implant company Cochlear at Sydney's Macquarie University in North Ryde. The project will anchor Macquarie University's new hearing precinct. The six-storey Cochlear building is expected to have an end value of about \$130 million. It will be the centerpiece of the University hearing research and teaching facility precinct, which the Federal government kick-started last year with a \$40 million grant. Watpac expects it to be completed late next year.

Over-64s Prove Real Survivors (The Australian, April 9, 2009)

Demographer Bernard Salt believes the global financial crisis (GFC) is having a differential impact on the employment prospects of different age groups. Indeed he says there is one generation that has prospered in the workforce over the past 12 months. That's right, prospered! Across all age groups bar one, the unemployment rate has inched upwards over the 12 months to February 2009. And the name of the generation that increased its share of the job market at a time when others are being laid off? It's the over 64-s. This is the generation that is said to predate the baby boomer. Interestingly, the over-64s were still at the peak of their careers when the last recession hit hardest in 1992. It was today's over-64s in management roles who were making all the tough calls. The greater workforce participation by older workers, which has risen by an average of more than 1000 a month, appears to be a reflection of the onset of the GFC. As the value of self-funded retirees nest egg diminishes, there is increased pressure for this group to return to the workforce. One would think this was easier said than done, but apparently this isn't the case. Salt ponders "why is it that a group of tired old technophobes can get a job when young go-getter sub-Gen Ys are being offloaded at a rate of more than 3000 a month?" Salt believes the answer lies in a concept that 20-something Gen Ys might like to learn a bit more about during the downturn. This is the concept of "the committed relationship" that is built up over time in a workplace and with an employer. "Older workers may not know how to boot, download or reboot. They may not know how to tweet, twitter or Google. Most undoubtedly think that a Wikipedia is a form of insect. But after a lifetime in the workforce, what they do know is how an employer thinks. Perhaps these aging fading war babies have a thing or two to teach the rest of us about how to survive and thrive in adversity".

Personality & Hearing Aids (ENT News Mar/Apr 2009 Vol 18 No 1)

Increasingly more and more research is being done to determine whether a person's personality can affect hearing aid benefit. For example, research has shown that people with extroverted personalities received more communication benefit from hearing aids compared with people with introverted personalities (Cox, 1999). The research being conducted in this joint psychological / audiological arena is determining whether psychological profiles should start to be included in the audiology test battery, and if so, how the results can be used to predict a client's level of satisfaction with a hearing aid.

One psychological test that is considered to be valid and reliable, is the Myers-Briggs test. This test produces a crude profile of personality and creates a general description of how that personality sees the world. You can't take the entire test for free, but you can go on to the Myers-Briggs website & take a shortened version. You will be asked a series of questions that will determine what personality type you are from a result of a series of four letters. This leads to 16 different personality types, each with a different world view. For example, one personality type is INFJ—introverted, intuitive, feeling, judging. Famous people with this type were Mother Teresa & Nelson Mandela.

This test alone is not being touted as a robustly scientific or audiological process, but it is a bit of fun to do and something that may well explain the psychology of yourself or others!

Simply Google 'Myers-Briggs personality test' for a range of versions to try, or go to <http://www.myersbriggs.org>

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Audiology Benefits from Australian Health Insurance Funds

The below benefits are available to top extras and/or hospital / extras package holders. Lesser covers will provide lesser or no cover for the items listed. I would advise all clients to check their entitlements before making a claim.

HEALTH FUND	AUDIOLOGY BENEFITS	HEARING AID BENEFITS	QUALIFYING / LIMITS	COMMENTS
HCI	\$50 (\$200 limit)	Up to \$2000	2 yrs / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
LaTrobe Health	\$65 (up to \$1000)	Up to \$1000	1 yr / 5 yrs	Repairs covered
HCF	\$52 (no limit)	Up to \$1600	2 yrs / 5 yrs	
AHM	\$32	Up to \$1600	1 yr / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
CBHS	(up to \$360 total)	Up to \$1500	1 yr / 3 yrs	GP referral needed
ACA Health	50% of cost	Up to \$1500	3 yrs / 3 yrs	Repairs / Batteries
Defense Health	\$40 (no limit)	Up to \$1000	1 yr / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
GMHBA	\$25 (up to \$400)	Up to \$800	1 yr / 3 yrs	
Medibank Private	\$160 (package bonus)	Up to \$800	3 yrs / 3 yrs	Cover dependent
Qld Teachers Union	\$72 (up to \$240)	Up to \$800	2 yrs / 3 yrs	
Doctor's Health	\$40 pa	Up to \$800	2 yrs / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
Qld Country Health	\$50 (up to \$160)	Up to \$550	1 yr / 3 yrs	
MBF	Nil	Up to \$2000	3 yrs / 3 yrs	
CUA	Nil	Up to \$1250	1 yr / 3 yrs	
Health Partners	Nil	Up to \$1150	1 yr / 5 yrs	GP referral needed
Manchester Unity	Nil	Up to \$1000	2 yr / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
Australian Unity	Nil	Up to \$1000	1 yr / 3 yrs	GP referral needed
NRMA / SGIC	Nil	Up to \$1000	1 yr / 3 yrs	
SGIO	Nil	Up to \$1000	3 yrs / 3 yrs	
NIB	Nil	Up to \$800	3 yrs / 5 yrs	
HBA (Bupa)	Nil	Up to \$850	1 yr / 3 yrs	Repairs covered
HBF	Nil	Up to \$650	3 yrs / 5 yrs	

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Six Years

Incredibly it has now been six years since I commenced my audiology clinic. The 'digital technology revolution' has certainly made it a very dynamic time to be involved in audiology. I am extremely fortunate to love what I do, and most of this is due not to any current or future technology developments but to the terrific bunch of clients I have. I look forward to the clinic's continuing growth and development.

My sincere thanks for your loyalty and support.

Warmest Regards,

Bronwen

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING CLOSURE DATES:

- **August 20 (Gold Coast, Australia)**

AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF AUDIOLOGY (ACAUD): NATIONAL CONGRESS

- **November 9—20 (Chicago, USA)**

HEARING CARE FOR ADULTS: *THE CHALLENGE OF AGEING*

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