



Hearing Wellness Journey #4 Episode

• • • Welcome to the Hearing Wellness Journey Podcast, an exploration of determination, hope, self discovery, and triumph. We'll share the personal experiences of those that are living with hearing loss and provide a haven for their stories to show others that they are not alone in this journey. Your hosts, Dr. Dawn Heiman and Lindsay Doherty.

Hello, Linda. Thank you so much for coming. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, who you are, where you're from?

Originally from New England born in Connecticut, my dad was a pilot, so we actually moved quite a bit when I was growing up. Went to college in Boston. Had been working for McDonald's for quite a few years, even at that point.

And when I graduated, I worked for them in store management and then took a career transfer to the corporate office. And so that's how I ended up in Chicago. Got married two kids and many years later.

Excellent. And was your family ever affected by hearing loss? When you were growing up, do you remember anyone?

Don't have clear memory of that? No. I had a couple, my office and my father was the baby of 11. And so I do remember his parents, but not from the hearing loss standpoint. My mother's mother died very swiped step-grandmother. She would venture nineties. But I think her hearing is pretty good.

And then unfortunately my mom died young and then my dad, he was 78, but I think his hearing was pretty good. We didn't see him that often. But yeah, so no real memories.

So at what point did you realize that something was going on with you?

It was probably at least about five years ago and I noticed both my husband and I what'd you say?

So the two of us going back and forth and I was still working at the time. And I think I realized, even at the office having to ask people, what did you say or are you did I hear you right?

And did you initially seek out help or did you resist?

I felt I would go get tested. I thought my husband should have been tested at the time.



But he wasn't going. So I thought I'll just go get tested and see what's happening.

And so what happened was it when you went to, for the hearing evaluation, what was that like? Was there any aha moment or anything that was I wiped them to you? Of course the interesting thing is almost like going to the eye doctor, if you haven't been wearing glasses, No, you go to the eye deck.

I can see, of course I can see. And then you put glasses on. You're like, oh, that's what that is. So it's was the same thing with hearing because I could hear, I don't have any issues. And then you see the hearing test, and then you see results and you're like, oh, I guess I don't hear that.

But I went to an ear, nose and throat doctor at the time. Cause I had seen before about other issues. And he had, he sold hearing aids in his office. So I spoke to his technicians, but they were so super expensive.

So at that point I felt I had the testing and I had some information about aids, but I didn't at the time I did not purchase.

So how long did you wait before you sought out another option?

I would say it was about a year and a half. And I have joined or I'd been a member of the Oak Brook Park District and I think it, one of their flyers or a mailing or something I had seen your name.

And then that's how I went to your office probably about a year later,

so year and a half. So you went back to the office after you saw an ENT, knowing that there may be is a problem and did you do anything to try to strategize or let people know, I'm not really hearing so great, but I'm not really ready yet.

Did the conversation happen with anyone? Did you tell anybody?

Yeah, but nobody else really?

Yeah. And did you start to realize that there was more and more of a struggle now that you're aware? Or it was just about the same, some people you hear in some you don't.

It was about the same until I got hearing aids I was like, oh,

So when you were finally ready, you made the appointment, you came in for the evaluation.



I know you saw one of my former colleagues and with that how did it go? What was that first day? Did she offer you to try hearing aids?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yep. Yep. It was like, okay. Let's just. Do it know. And I don't have to, it was a 30 day trial or something like that. So that was a while ago now.

I think what 2017 so yeah, and actually it was amazing because they're very easy to use. It's not like you have to learn all that. And I remember going to the ladies room and I could hear the crunch of this paper towels. And it was like whoosh. Wild. Oh, I hear sounds that I didn't used to hear before.

It was really, like I said, aha oh, it was a good thing.

That's cool. So then when you got home, Or even in your car, was the, do you remember having anything at home or you're walking around going, this is my house, but you had asked your husband, do you hear that? Do you hear that? What was it like that first week with the hearing aids on

Having to turn things down, like the radio in the car and the television and just not having to have things at such a volume.

You did before. But day to day, not like a huge, huge shift.

Were you still working at that point?

The funny thing is I remember having a conversation with the doctor about the fact that I wear a headset at work and she was thinking there was going to have to be some kind of adjustment.

Because of the headset and then the wild thing was, I actually left that position. So at the same time. So it hasn't been an issue at this point.

Cool. Now, were you ever worried that, if I get hearing aids, everyone's going to know it and I don't know if I want to do this. Did you ever have this like internal struggle about doing something?

Never? No. First of all,

I got the hair, unless I cut my hair really short. You can't even see them. I had a friend recently, this is now three years out. Tell me, oh, I didn't know you had hearing aids. They're so like they're there, but they're not there. Sometimes I didn't realize I have them on and frankly I really don't care because I want to hear, I know how important that is.



Especially as you age. To be able to hear things, understand people, join in conversations, not have to ask, What'd you say what'd you say, oh, can you say that again? So we really was, no, no hesitation, really.

That's awesome. So do you think in your opinion that there's a negative stigma around hearing loss?

Yeah. Yeah, I do. And people. Don't want to address it. I also think cost is prohibitive for a lot of people. And I wish there was some way that could be addressed through insurance or what have you. Because I think that's a big barrier.

Yeah. I think a lot of people are afraid to have that conversation, or there are places that only sell them for really expensive.

Okay. And so if they don't know that there are very good, cheaper options available now, they're not going to have all the bells and whistles, but there are payment plans. And now in Illinois, there are quite a few insurances that pay up to \$5,000 every two years towards hearing aids. United health care hearing.

It's like the ARP Medicare advantage program. If you're a retired teacher if you worked for the airlines, there are some really good programs.

Yeah. I don't think people are aware they're

right there. They hear a bad story and then assume it's going to be the same way for them.

They do require, you have to be careful with them as I found out with whole mask wearing last year.

Cause they're small, they're little they're light. You're like, oh, are they here? So there is. Some attendance you have, it has to be paid, right?

So I think some people, it, whether it's an excuse or it's a valid point, some people will say I can't handle one more thing to have to take care of.

How many minutes a day do you think you use to manage your hearing aids?

Two.

Exactly.



You just have to be conscious, correct. This conscious effort, replaced the batteries, clean them off a little with a little brush, which we're using, even taking them out. Sometimes I'll go to bed and I'll forget, I had months.

So you want to take them out and make sure you don't run that the battery. Not a big time commitment

in a sense, it's like contact lenses minus the batteries. If you put it in right in the morning, you're not going to worry about it falling out all day long and constantly trying to correct what you rushed in the morning, but once you put them on, they're pretty solid all day long.

And then yeah, you go to bed and you have to remember. Oops, I got to take these out.

Yeah. Yeah. That's just, I think it's the same. Yeah. Cool.

Are there ever discussions that you have with people that you know, they're struggling and they maybe don't want to go there? They're avoiding, they don't talk about their hearing loss.

What do you say to these people or this person

I'm pointing to the person. My husband, yes. He's actually gone to get testing, but has not taken the next step.

He's not ready.

It'd be good. It'd be so good. Everything I read, everything you see again about healthy aging, maybe it's a little different for someone in their thirties or forties.

I don't know. I'd still be good to hear, but as you're aging, to have hearing loss, I think is extremely detrimental to your health. Especially cognitive.

Cognitive for sure. Compliance with, if you were, if you're put on a new medication, you have to be able to hear the instructions properly. Otherwise you could end up in the emergency room because you didn't take it as often, or maybe two of us.

Sure. Yeah. Hearing for safety reasons. That someone's breaking into your house. Yeah. Oh, so there is a process in accepting hearing loss and the, just maybe accepting a death in the family or something that you weren't expecting, or even the parents go through it. If their child is born with a hearing loss and the first step is usually.

Denial. And some people can stay in that denial stage for years, sometimes it's weeks. And then they can go into the stage of anger. Why me? And then eventually we hope they get to the point



where they're like, okay, I'm exhausted. I'm tired of having excuses or being angry. I'm ready. Let's do this. So empowering people with information about how, what, if you get over this hump, your life will be so much easier and happier.

If you say I'm worth it healthier. Healthier. Yeah, you get to just sit back and relax and enjoy a movie. You get to be in the conversation with your friends and when they're telling a joke, you hear the entire joke. It, it is healthier. It reduces your blood pressure. It improves your brain function.

You're learning new things.

I know he's listening. So I,

It's, this is not easy. And I'm glad that you're talking about this and that, he is even here because there will be others that are listening to this podcast that they're not sure where they're at in their journey. At what point is it bad enough? Or some people are identified at one age and then they, for whatever reason, stop using the hearing aids.

And then because they were frustrated or they gave up or embarrassed, who knows what, but we want people to realize that the stigma, what other people think about you is just an imaginary mind block. And once you do something, you are happier.

Yeah, I've definitely when you commit yeah.

Commit when you're ready.

And then people walk in my office sometimes like angry. You can tell they're frustrated. They're not there because of themselves. They don't want to be there when they leave. They're like dancing out and so excited and plotting about who they're not going to tell that they're wearing hearing aids, but they're going to make sure that they hear those conversations.

Yeah, it's unfortunate. But I think the whole stigma has to do with really the whole aging period, older and, not, maybe not doing all the things you used to do and having white hair and, just. Just the ageism that exists.

I think you bring up a very valid point. It's not just the hearing.

It's just, it's maybe mourning the change in your body. It's hard to embrace change, but even more. So if it's a change that you're not ready for

well, and you really have no control over and it's not necessarily going to get better and you can't pop a pill. I it, so it's more mechanical to get with



mechanical.

And the irony is the sooner that you do something, the more it is like you popped a pill because it does work. It does make you happier and actually acting younger. You don't want to be that guy sitting in the corner. That's not following the conversation. That's not smiling. That is assuming everyone's laughing at him.

Because you don't know what they

said.

You want to be the guy that jumps in and goes, oh yeah. Guess what? And is in the conversation and is just as witty and smart as you've always been. Yeah. So what is your favorite part about hearing like paper towels? What are some of the sounds that you actually love with your hearing aids on that you don't hear when you take them off?

Probably more like nature sounds, birds just, wind and rustling leaves and maybe the more subtle things that you wouldn't actually pick up on music,

Music is so good for your brain. Did you know that they've done studies where they put electrodes on people's heads ended functional MRI? So they're awake for the MRI and music is the only thing that lights up your entire brain at once. Yeah. It's so stimulating. It can instantly transport you in time.

It can elicit memories. It's just so powerful. So if you can have your world. All day long, even if it's a quiet time where you're reading or you're doing laundry and you hate doing laundry, turn on music and it does more for your brain. It enhances the the experience.

Unless you have the blasting, then it is not

hearing aids on, everything in moderation, even though you love Brussels sprouts, you should not eat a pound of them, right? Yeah. Don't over indulge in your music, but if it gets you up dancing, Hey, that's a good thing. Yeah. So of all the things that we talked about today, what would be one thing that is like the one takeaway that you want people to know?

I was thinking of that Nike ad, just do it. I know it's hard for people to just, automatically give up hang ups or hesitations. But what have I read? I think I saw a saying the other day recently, that kind of struck home just about things in general.

And it was about thinking that something's impossible until you do it and that's it. Jumped in. Yeah. Really critical to overall be..



I think it's true. Just do it. And just because one person had a bad experience doesn't mean you will just because one person had a bad experience swimming once doesn't mean you will.

We're all different.

Oh, yeah. That's not why we're doing this. Actually. This is, so the point of this podcast is to try to get the stories out there. This does not exist anywhere. I have checked. I've done my research. I keep double checking. There are no podcasts where people tell their hearing loss stories. Yes. So you may or may not know.

So my youngest has type one diabetes. There are a couple type one. Podcasts where people are coming on and they're telling their child's story, they're telling their personal story. They're the doctor telling stories and it is so comforting. It doesn't make his diabetes go away. It doesn't make his equipment stop suddenly breaking or hiccups happening, but it gives me a sense of community.

It gives me a sense of I'm not in this alone as a parent in it. They also have some really cool tips and tricks that people life hacks that they've created, or they said, Hey, you know what, try strawberries or banana right before they go out on soccer field, is there any tip or trick that you found.

That's a good question. Having them super handy, no, you don't want to put them away or lock them under key or just, they have to be like right there. Now some days I'm getting, I'm going to the pool I'm not wearing them to school, but then when I come home, I have to try and remember to put them on.

So just having them present. And with batteries with

the batteries,

check your battery.

I really appreciate your time. I really appreciate your your openness and willing to share your story. It's not easy to get on camera. It's not easy to tell your be vulnerable. But I think you're going to help a lot of people because they might not be ready yet, but it was comforting for someone like you that is so kind and beautiful and normal and nice.

And to come on here and they can say, you know what? I'm just like her. I think it's going to be okay.



It is. And maybe people, I feel like I had a pretty easy transition. There might be people with other medical kinds of conditions that, but if you get a good doctor should be good.

Absolutely. Thank you. You guys have a wonderful day and hopefully it starts to heat up outside. I think it is going to be beautiful soon. Yes.

Yay.

And if you need me or anything, just ask. Okay.

Thank you. Thanks doctor. Bye. Take care. Bye now.

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