

As a result of a head injury, I lost hearing in my left ear and partial hearing in my right ear. I started wearing a hearing aid.

I struggled for 15 years to remain normal in the hearing world at work, at home and in the public. Noisy surroundings were extremely difficult. Even in quiet surroundings, I had to concentrate and use other methods to allow me to hear appropriately. I honestly got tired of asking people to repeat things, so I stopped asking.

Five years later I woke up with Sudden Hearing Loss in my only hearing ear. Some of the hearing returned but it was extremely reduced. It became more difficult to function in everyday life. My hearing aid was at the loudest level possible and I was still asking people to repeat things. I could no longer talk on the phone effectively and had a reduced understanding level.

Luckily, Bluetooth devices allowed sound to go directly to my hearing aid, so I was able again to function a little by using the cell phone and Bluetooth microphone.

Eventually, I was a candidate for a cochlear implant. I was, frankly, worried about the implant procedure, outcome success, recovery, future, cost, etc., that I did not make the decision to have the implant until a year later. I then realized that I would only benefit from a Cochlear Implant and the decision was made.

I have wasted *so much* time and energy to communicate as a hearing person when if I were to *just admit the truth* to people, life would be *so much* easier. I know this intellectually, but emotionally, it's difficult. I wish I could declare that I don't have any shame or embarrassment associated with being hearing impaired, but it would not be the truth.

I realize the recovery will entail a lot of hard work on my part, that it will take up to a couple years of rehabilitation before hearing things will get better, and even then it is a continued learning process. There will be a lot of frustration, ups & downs, when the going gets tough! And it most definitely will get tough.

What is the scariest thing about the surgery for me? Cochlear implant may not work at all. Losing the hope of improvement would be devastating and thinking that complete deafness is down the road.

Because the surgery disturbs the inner ear, the balance center of the body, there is potential to be completely out of balance. I already have some level of unbalance, but to get even worse would be devastating in the ability to get around.

Most people don't realize that when you get a cochlear implant, music will never sound the same. Voices will never sound the same.

Another fear was the sound of my husband's voice changing – he has a lovely deep voice, and I can really feel the timbre of it when he speaks.

But now, I am ready to give those up if it means I will hear better. Sometimes communication with people around you is more important than hearing a beautiful, awe-inspiring song, or swooning over your partner's voice!

Because of the way a cochlear implant works – every single sound around you is translated into this high-pitched tone! It is hard to imagine. It really is. I have had many people tell me what it is like, but ... I guess nothing will prepare you for the experience.

And what about my own voice?  
Now *that* is going to be weird.

After surgery my fears were of naught. Surprisingly, I felt pretty good. I am dealing with a mixture of emotions. Now my worries had changed to “will it be successful”. I will be dependent on the implant and processor for the rest of my life. So, the scariest question in my mind now is “Will it work and if it does then what will the world sound like with the implant?”

I'm nervous that it won't work. I'm excited too. I can't wait to start hearing things better, trying new things and things I haven't been able to do for years.

It will not restore full hearing but I will get the sound as best as it can be for me. I want to appreciate everything I hear because it is the small moments that make a huge difference in life.

I've read the activation process after surgery is a very individualized experience. Some people hear right away; others may take weeks or months to hear well. Most describe the activation process as a series of loud beeps, static, pops, with voices initially sounding robotic or Mickey Mouse.

I also fear how I will make sense of music and use the telephone? Both are challenges with a cochlear implant.

Switch On Day: I tried not to expect too much on the first day and to take it one day at a time. But it was hard. I imagine there was fear that it would not work and uncertainty.

The testing beeps were very strange at first. At the lowest volume, I could 'feel' them, rather than 'hear' them. When the implant was turned on, I heard pretty much everything. Wow, what a lot of noise!

It was all beeps, and crackles at first. There were also squeaking and swishing noises. The audiologist spoke - squeak SQUEAK squeeeeeeeek beep? - if I hadn't been lipreading her, I would have had no clue what she was saying.

Then there was a strange beeping and squeaking. Where is it coming from? Oh its stopped now...hang on, is that my voice??

She went through some words (days of the week and months) and they sounded much too similar to identify. Then her voice gradually started sounding like Minnie Mouse and I actually understood when she said the days of the week and months. She covered her mouth and had me repeat some words from a picture chart and I got all of them correct. Towards the end of the afternoon, she sounded less Minnie Mousey.

I had resigned myself that I would not hear anything upon activation except beeps, crackles, and static. So I was greatly encouraged that I heard words even if it was Minnie Mouse sounding.

Days after the activation and I was still hearing Minnie Mouse sounds! Nothing sounds as it should. It's very annoying but I know it won't last.

In a way it is also good because I'm hearing things beep and squeak when before I hadn't even known it made a sound - scratching my head, my jewelry jangling, footsteps, car indicators, the tapping of sending a text message, my breathing coming out in a big 'whoooooosh'...

I'm trying to avoid busy environments because it's just a barrage of squeaks and beeps. When I'm home alone, it's a lot easier to tell where the beeps are coming from!

I'm also getting really really tired and getting lots of headaches. The temptation to take the speech processor off is huge, but I won't, because I need to get used to the noises and it will never start to make sense unless I bear with it.

The first mapping marked another cochlear implant milestone. To "fine tune" the device. I was so ready. I was very excited. My first mapping proved to be my most victorious situation yet. Noises surrounding me seemed to be recognizable. They still sounded robotic, but I could understand everything on the car talk radio and most of the TV.

Since my audiologist told me I was doing so wonderfully, I was fired up to rehabilitate and to *truly* start hearing. I still have difficulty understanding words that are very similar in sound.

When I was first activated, I would go through the words and they sounded much too similar to identify. At the first mapping, I went through a lot of the words again, and I felt like I was doing better. After a hearing test, the audiologist said I was hearing in the normal range – that did not include understanding, just hearing. But what a great improvement!!

I hate to downplay the success of my first mapping (I can already hear my readers telling me to be kind to myself), but looking back, I think Mapping Day was a really, *really* good hearing day. Together, my left and right ears were little champions.

I'm also constantly reminding myself that I have to work my *implanted ears*. I'm still

waiting for my amazing “I can’t believe I heard that” moment. I remain optimistic. Slow and steady, I progress, continuing my journey of both good days and bad. My pity party was brief, though; I realized I just needed to keep practicing.

Occasionally I catch myself understanding a word or two without looking. In any case, the more I listen, I realize that the world is quieter and more difficult to understand *without* the implant—another minor victory considering I wanted to throw the device in Lake Michigan when I first started wearing it.

Let me say, I am thrilled with my choice to go through this journey. It was hard and scary. We all go through difficult things. But we all have the faith, support and love of family and friends to carry us through. I have great empathy for those experiencing medical issues. We still have a long way to go, but I have hope. Hope for better changes.