



## BE AWARE

WHEN interacting with people who have a hearing impairment, remember to think of the person before the disability. There are a few things to be aware of:

- ▶ Get their attention before speaking
- ▶ Face them
  - ▶ Don't turn away while talking
  - ▶ Come to the point
  - ▶ Don't shout
  - ▶ Don't speak too quickly
  - ▶ Don't cover your mouth

## HEAR SAY

CAN you hear it? The sound of laughter, the crashing waves, the birds singing, the children playing.

For one in 10 Australians this is not easy because they have significant hearing loss.

Those who are deaf or have a hearing disability cannot hear at normal levels because of a variety of factors.

Hearing loss is measured by an audiogram in decibels (loudness) and

frequency (pitch).

A person's level of hearing loss depends on their degree of hearing impairment, the age at which it occurred and other factors that influence communication. Deafness or a hearing impairment can be hereditary or caused by viruses, diseases of the ear, exposure to loud noises or natural aging.

## LET'S TALK



WE SPOKE with Jenny Munroe, a successful and talented journalist and sub-editor. Jenny, 28, grew up in Hervey Bay and completed her education in Toowoomba and Armidale.

She was born with a moderate to severe hearing impairment and has worn hearing aids in both ears since she was three.

**Q: Does your hearing impairment affect your everyday life?**

**A:** It depends on the situation. I often miss out on banter and lose track of conversations in larger groups. I tend to sit back and probably come across as shy or stand-offish. It can be frustrating because I am not really like that. But generally no – adaptability is the key. I can do my job and live my life as well as anyone, and if there are issues, I ask for assistance.

**Q: What services / technologies help you in your daily life?**

**A:** My hearing aids have a "T" switch that I use when on the phone – it blocks out all background noise so I can focus. I use my mobile phone as an alarm clock – I put it under my pillow and the vibrations wake me. Subtitles on TV and DVDs have made a huge difference. We take it for granted, but texting and online communication such as email and social media are also helpful. These have opened up communication channels for the hearing impaired.

**Q: What strategies help you overcome your hearing impairment?**

**A:** I make sure I can see the person or people I'm speaking to – I'm big on lip reading. If I'm struggling, I have to say "Look, I'm deaf and I'm having trouble hearing you, can you please speak up / slow down / stop mumbling". Often people don't realise I'm hearing impaired.

**Q: How do you think society could better accommodate people with hearing loss?**

**A:** I think if people understand the simple everyday things like looking at people when speaking to them, speaking clearly, not mumbling and not eating when speaking. It's important to have visual cues and signage.

**Q: At school, did your impairment have an impact on your learning or socially?**

**A:** I was lucky to have teachers who were accommodating and aware – not to mention my supportive parents. Socially I did have the occasional difficulty, including a short period of bullying in primary school. However, I was lucky to have good friends who saw beyond my impairment and saw me for the person I am.

## LOUD SHIRT DAY

IF YOU see people wearing outrageous outfits with bright stripes, crazy patterns, large colourful spots or an array of fluoro on Friday, October 21, they're probably doing it for a good cause or they're trying to make a fashion statement. It's Loud Shirt Day – an opportunity for the community to raise funds to help deaf and hearing-impaired children access services that deliver therapies in sound and speech. Loud Shirt Day coincides with the National Week of Deaf People.

## LIVE WITH IT

FOR people not experienced with hearing loss it can be hard to understand the difficulties that arise from such an everyday process. Hearing loss can impact on a person's ability to communicate with confidence, can lead to isolation, affect educational and employment opportunities and compromise safety as they can't hear warning sounds.

However, those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment learn to live with it. Hearing aids, cochlear implants, vibrating clocks, captioned videos, interpreters, hearing dogs, amplified phones, listening devices, audio loops and closed caption TV are some technologies that make the lives of those with hearing loss a little easier.

## HEALTHY HEARING

SOME people are born with hearing impairment but you can lose your hearing for many reasons. Experts believe people are losing their hearing at much younger ages than they did 30 years ago. The main cause is over exposure to loud noises, which can lead to a condition known as noise-induced hearing loss. Personal music players are among the biggest culprits of NIHL as well as video games, television sets, movie theatres, traffic, and some machines and appliances that can all make the environment too noisy for the average person.

There are steps you can take to reduce your risk of this type of hearing loss. Turn down the volume on your stereo, TV, and especially the headset on your music player. Wear earplugs if you're going to a loud concert or other event, like a car race. Wear special protective earmuffs if you operate a lawn mower or leaf blower, or other loud machinery.

See your doctor if you suspect any problems with your hearing, and get your hearing tested on a regular basis.



**NEXT WEEK: CONSIDER KIDS**