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Hear now. And always

Cochlear Family

A Caregivers Toolkit to Support Seniors



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“
It was about being patient,
encouraging him to persevere.”

Jodie, wife of David, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient.

Introduction

If you are a caregiver to a senior who has recently received a cochlear implant, you can play an important role in supporting them to achieve their best possible hearing. From using good listening skills to improve conversations, to accompanying them to appointments with hearing healthcare professionals, to helping them master new technology, your support and understanding can help them to achieve their hearing goals.

According to research, making a consistent effort to practise listening and rehab exercises at home is one of the most important things a person can do after receiving their cochlear implant. But it will take time and practice before they are able to achieve their best hearing.^{1,2} Studies also suggest that cochlear implant recipients can continue to achieve their hearing goals if they continue to do their rehab exercises long term.^{1,2}

For seniors, relationships and communication are important for quality of life and wellbeing, keeping them connected to the people and activities they love. It's also vital for caregivers to be able to identify and respond to the communication needs of the senior and understand the best approach to take when supporting them after activation. Working in partnership with them and their hearing healthcare professional, you can motivate, inspire, and support the senior to persevere towards their hearing goals. In this guide, you will find lots of practical advice, tips and strategies to help them achieve this. The exercises in this guide are intended to supplement any guidance given from a hearing healthcare professional whose advice always takes priority. The hearing healthcare professional may also set up a bespoke program to meet specific hearing and lifestyle needs.

For communication strategies to help a senior build their listening confidence, please refer to the Communications Strategies Guide for Seniors. For exercises that the senior can do in the comfort of their own home, please refer to the Practical At-home Rehabilitation Exercises for Seniors.

Information and instructions within this guide have been extracted from the Adult Cochlear Implant Home-Based Auditory Training Manual: Postlingual Hearing Loss[®].

“

Don't wait for sound to come to you. Visit a farm, wineries a repair shop... any place with a distinctive set of sounds is a listening target.

”

Andreas and his wife Caroline, a Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient.



Communication techniques to help with hearing rehab exercises

The use of communication techniques can help to improve a senior's hearing and listening performance. We've put together the following tips to help you, as a caregiver, facilitate the person's hearing rehab therapy so that together you can work towards their hearing goals. We recommend talking to a hearing healthcare professional to get their advice on communicating effectively, so you can tailor your approach to meet the senior's specific hearing and lifestyle needs.

Get their attention

- 1 Before you begin any rehab exercises, you'll need to make sure you have the senior's full attention. Polite ways to do this include stepping into their line of sight, calmly waving a hand in their direction or lightly tapping them on their shoulder, taking care not to startle them. Make sure they are wearing their sound processor and always make sure you schedule exercises at a time when they are feeling refreshed and relaxed.

Face the senior person when talking to them

- 2 Proper lighting and visibility can help a senior use visual cues to better understand what is being said to them. They may also use lip-reading to help support their listening skills, but even if they don't, they can gain a great deal of information by looking at your mouth, facial expressions, and body language. Make sure you face them directly while speaking so they can clearly see your mouth moving when you're talking to them. Try to maintain normal eye contact throughout as this will help you establish a strong sense of connection.

Eliminate any background noise

- 3 Find a quiet room to practise any rehab exercises with the senior. Remember that background noise, such as a television, radio, other people talking, or even traffic, can all make it harder for a person who has just received their cochlear implant to follow a conversation. Switch off any electronics that might make noise in the background or turn them down until you've completed the hearing rehab exercises.

Speak clearly

- 4 A little extra volume can really help when talking to a senior with a cochlear implant. There is no need to shout. Try to speak at a normal pace and only adjust your speed if you can see that they are struggling to follow the conversation.

Use hand gestures and facial expressions

- 5 Speaking expressively by using hand gestures and facial expressions can help really help to 'fill in the gaps' if the senior misses a word or two. Use gestures to enhance meaning, but still incorporate other ways of helping them to hear you clearly, such as enunciating your words carefully while facing them.

Use repetition

- 6 When you begin hearing rehab exercises, it's important to remember that the person may not fully comprehend what you've said on the first try. You may need to repeat yourself. If they seem confused, don't hesitate to ask if they've understood. When repeating, try using the exact same words and phrasing a couple of times. Exact repetition may help them piece together the entire thought you're expressing, whereas constantly changing what you're saying can be counterproductive and may make them doubt what they thought you said initially.

When to rephrase a word

- 7 After activation, a senior might struggle to hear certain sounds. If you've tried repeating a word several times and they still don't seem to be understanding, the problem may lie in the way the word sounds. In this instance, try to find a different way to express the same word.

Have a pen and paper to hand

- 8 If repetition isn't serving either of you well and you've tried to rephrase what you're trying to convey and the senior still doesn't understand, write the word down on a piece of paper. Seeing and hearing the word will help them identify and recognise a sound they may be missing. Also consider using live captioning on a smartphone or tablet to help support the senior's understanding.

Be patient

- 9** It's important to encourage the senior to be patient when practising their rehab exercises. Misunderstandings and awkward moments are bound to happen but always offer reassurance and support. They will appreciate it.

Be emotionally supportive

- 10** Learning how to hear with a cochlear implant is difficult, even for a senior who is resilient. It's normal for them to experience moments of frustration when they don't feel they are making sufficient progress. Like all new cochlear implant recipients, they will need plenty of encouragement and understanding when they first start out. Celebrate every hearing milestone, big or small, and encourage them to keep on going.

Be respectful

- 11** Keep in mind that if a senior is having trouble following a conversation, it might be that they can't yet identify a certain word or sound. Take hearing rehab therapy slowly and always treat the senior with respect – they will appreciate it. And it will give them the self-confidence to persevere towards their hearing goals.

Keep a listening diary

- 12** A listening diary is a great way to track the senior's progress and make a note of any issues or concerns. This will serve as a useful tool if you accompany them to appointments with their hearing healthcare professional. It can be overwhelming for a senior to remember all the things they may need to discuss at their appointments. A listening diary will help to jog their memory so they can seek advice on ways to tackle any challenges or setbacks.

“

There are a lot of things you can do at home to help your hearing. It's the simple things that make all the difference. Involve your family and friends as much as possible – you're not in this thing alone.

Tom, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient.

”



Tips to help seniors embrace technology

Many seniors are avid technology users and can navigate the internet and social media as confidently as younger generations. But barriers do exist for some seniors when it comes to accessing and using technology. They may have vision, memory or dexterity problems, or they may lack basic digital skills. The pace of technological change can also make it hard for them to stay abreast of the latest updates or devices. We have put together some tips to help you support their progress at home. We recommend talking to a hearing healthcare professional about how you can support the senior with their hearing technology and their progress and development at home. A hearing healthcare professional will give the senior comprehensive training on how to use their hearing technology.

Take it slowly

- 1 It's always best to start with short training sessions so you don't overload the senior with information. Remember that new cochlear implant recipients may experience listening fatigue after activation, so it's important to factor this in. Show patience, take frequent breaks, and always ask the senior if they have any questions.

Write it down

- 2 As you move through different tasks, always document them. Record passwords, logins and URLs for useful websites in a notebook, and write down instructions on how to use an app, change a battery on a sound processor, stream from a smartphone, or download a video. This is especially important after activation, when the senior is learning how to listen with their cochlear implant. Writing it down will help them identify words, but it will also serve as a reference guide to help jog their memory.

Build on any existing knowledge

- 3 When introducing new technology to a senior, it's good to leverage their existing knowledge in other areas to help further their understanding. For example, if you compare a web address to a street address, a concept that they are already familiar with, it will help them understand the concept of navigating a website.

Tailor it to their needs

- 4 Find out what the senior is interested in and what their level of experience is. This will enable you tailor your approach to their needs and inspire excitement and interest.

Highlight the relevance

- 5 If the senior has spent most of their life without technology, they might not understand what it has to offer them. Always explain the relevance of an app or a device and its specific application for their hearing goals. This will help them understand the positive difference it can make to their hearing journey. Once they appreciate how much they can gain from using a smartphone or an app for example, they'll be more motivated to use it.

Avoid technical words

- 6 Although words like 'app', 'wifi', 'download' and 'stream' might seem commonplace, it is important to remember that some seniors may not be familiar with tech-related terms. Using technical jargon may be alienating to the senior, so get creative and try to find other ways to describe things.

Take it at their pace

- 7 This may seem obvious, but it's important to make sure you are going at a pace that suits the senior. Pause between each step to give them a moment to process what they've just learned. Always check in with them to make sure they are comfortable with the pace or have any questions.

Repetition is key

- 8 Like anything new, it can take time to adapt to cochlear implant technology. As always, practice makes perfect so repeating instructions can help the senior to gain confidence in using their device.

Encourage them to ask questions

- 9 Schedule regular time for the senior to ask questions before moving on to new concepts. Some seniors may feel like they can't ask a question if there isn't a specific time for asking them. By encouraging them to do this, it will also give you an idea of what concepts you need to spend extra time on.

Encourage them to practise their new skills

- 10 Encourage the senior to take an active role in technology by practising their new skills in front of you. By learning how to scroll, tap or click, they will learn how to master different aspects of technology. This will help to increase their independence and self-confidence as they make progress towards their hearing goals.

Adapt their devices to meet their physical needs

- 11 Some seniors have challenges beyond simply learning how to use technology, which may make it difficult for them to read text on a small touchscreen or use a keyboard. Then We recommend talking to a hearing healthcare professional for specific solutions tailored to meet the senior's needs.

Stay positive

- 12 Learning new things can be tough, especially when it feels like everyone else around you has already got the hang of it. For many seniors, the prospect of implementing technology into their lives after decades of living without it may feel daunting. Reassure them that learning something new is difficult, but that with time and effort it will get easier. Share the difficulties you may have experienced when you first learned to use technology.

Celebrate technology's 'wow' factor

- 13 It's easy for everyday users to take technology for granted but try to create opportunities to impress the senior. The more they see the incredible things that technology allows them to do and how beneficial it can be to their hearing journey, the more they will engage with it.



Tips to help seniors talk on the phone or online

The ability to talk on the phone or online can give the senior more independence. It can help them to complete everyday tasks more easily, such as making medical appointments or ordering groceries. It can also give them the opportunity to communicate more effectively with family and friends.

As a caregiver, you can play an important role in helping the senior to gain confidence by serving as their phone rehab practice partner. We recommend talking to a hearing healthcare professional for a tailored phone rehab practice program. You will also find some useful rehab and listening exercises in our [Adult Phone and Online Communication Guide](#).



Here are 10 useful tips to help guide your phone rehab with the senior:

- 1 Schedule regular 5-minute calls with the senior two to three times a week at a time when you know they are feeling refreshed and relaxed.
- 2 Make sure the senior is in a quiet place to take your phone calls, so there is no background noise to distract them.
- 3 Make sure you are also in a quiet place, so there is no risk of interference or background noise, and you can focus all your attention on helping the senior.
- 4 Before you get started, ask the senior to inform you straight away if they don't understand something. Ask them to be clear with their instructions for example, "I did not understand." "Please say it again." "Could you speak slower?"
- 5 Always check that they've heard things correctly by asking them to repeat what you've just said. Repetition will help them to recognise and identify different words.
- 6 Give them a newspaper article to read to you over the phone, then read the same article back to them. This will help them to tune in to the way your voice sound on the phone.
- 7 As they become more confident, suggest different topics to discuss on the phone. Knowing the topic in advance will give them some context about the vocabulary and subject matter you will be using and serve as a guide to help the conversation flow.
- 8 Rehearse real-life situations such as making an appointment with the doctor or ordering a takeaway meal. Ask them to repeat the phone numbers and times to check they've heard them correctly.
- 9 As they make progress, ask them to challenge themselves by taking phone calls in different rooms of the house or moving outside to familiarise themselves with listening when there is competing noise.
- 10 Once they have become more confident, try to find other phone rehab partners for the senior, so they can get used to hearing different voices on the phone.

Auditory and listening exercises for caregivers to practise with seniors

Here are some tips to help the senior get the best out of each exercise:

- Find a quiet area of the senior's home that's free from distractions and background noise.
- Sit 1 to 1.5 meters away from the senior, facing them so they can clearly see your face and mouth.
- Always give the senior positive feedback and encouragement.
- Take these exercises slowly and practise them with the senior over several months.
- Help the senior to keep track of their progress by documenting it in their listening diary.
- Once they feel confident with the exercises, turn on the radio or television, so there is background noise.
- If the senior is struggling with any of the exercises and you've tried different strategies, we recommend asking a hearing healthcare professional to check the senior's sound processor settings before revisiting the task.

Exercise 1: Identifying speech sounds³

This exercise becomes progressively more difficult. If the senior is experiencing difficulty in differentiating between the word pairs, we recommend speaking to a hearing healthcare professional about their sound processor settings.

Instructions for caregivers

1. The opposite tables have words that are grouped in pairs. Using your normal conversational voice, say the two words out loud and point to each word as you say it.
2. Repeat one of the two words out loud. This time don't point to the word.
3. Ask the senior to point to the word and then repeat it.
4. If the senior is struggling to correctly identify the word, repeat it several times before showing them the word and saying it. Come back to the same word later.

Vowel identification⁵

Level 1			Level 2			Level 3		
1	Theme	Thumb	1	Bath	Booth	1	Tea	Too
2	Sharp	Ship	2	Spark	Speak	2	Pit	Put
3	Teach	Touch	3	Tar	Too	3	Cap	Cup
4	Barn	Bin	4	Parch	Peach	4	Pit	Pet
5	Carp	Cup	6	Fast	Feast	6	Kid	Could
6	Port	Put	7	Hard	Herd	7	Bat	But
7	Peep	Pip	8	Barn	Bean	8	Bid	Bed
8	Mast	Must	9	Bars	Booze	9	Feed	Food
9	Wall	Wool	10	Park	Peak	10	Pill	Pull

Consonant Identification⁵

Level 1			Level 2			Level 3		
1	Rip	Rib	1	Pea	Me	1	Sum	Numb
2	Cap	Cab	2	Pop	Mop	2	Sea	Knee
3	Mop	Mob	3	Pie	My	3	Sap	Nap
4	Pick	Pig	4	Seen	Seat	4	Sit	Knit
5	Lack	Lag	6	Seen	Seat	6	Moose	Moon
6	Lock	Log	7	Ban	Bat	7	Horse	Horn
7	Cod	Cot	8	Mail	Bail	8	Mass	Man
8	Card	Cart	9	Me	Be	9	Man	Cane
9	Hard	Heart	10	Corn	Cord	10	Dice	Dine

Exercise 2: Identifying words⁵

In the table below, we have drawn up four lists of related words: animals, months of the year, colours and transport. You can also create your own lists, using sets of words that may be familiar to the senior e.g. sports, plants or food items.

Instructions for caregivers

1. From the list below, choose a topic and tell the senior what topic you will be discussing.
2. Say a word from the list out loud and ask the senior to repeat it.
3. If the senior is struggling to understand the word, point to the word and then repeat it out loud.
4. If the senior is struggling with this task, we recommend asking a hearing healthcare professional to check the senior's sound processor settings.

List 1		List 2		List 3		List 4	
Animals		Months		Colours		Transport	
1	Tiger	1	September	1	Blue	1	Car
2	Snake	2	March	2	Red	2	Train
3	Rabbit	3	July	3	Green	3	Airplane
4	Dog	4	February	4	Yellow	4	Bus
5	Monkey	5	August	5	Grey	5	Bicycle
6	Bear	6	October	6	Orange	6	Truck
7	Elephant	7	December	7	Black	7	Motorcycle
8	Cat	8	June	8	Pink	8	Boat
9	Deer	9	May	9	White	9	Helicopter
10	Frog	10	April	10	Purple	10	Van

Exercise 3: Recognising sentences⁴

For this exercise, ask the senior to repeat short sentences on a topic that they are familiar with. This can help them to recognise sentences. We have prepared two lists, but we recommend expanding upon these lists according to the senior's interests and lifestyle needs.

Instructions for caregivers

1. Explain to the senior what scenario you will be using e.g. At a restaurant, so they have some context.
2. Using your normal conversational voice, say the sentence out loud and ask the senior to respond to it.
3. Go down the list asking the senior each question
4. If the senior is struggling to understand the sentence, encourage them to use communication strategies such as, "I didn't quite get that. Would you mind repeating it?" or "Could you ask that question in a different way?"

List 1		List 2	
At a restaurant		At the grocery store	
1	Good evening. May I take your order?	1	What aisle is the cereal in?
2	How would you like your steak cooked?	2	I have five things on my shopping list
3	Would you like a table for two?	3	What time does the store close?
4	Is there anything else I can get for you?	4	I will use a shopping trolley today
5	What can I get you for dessert?	5	The bakery has fresh bread
6	I would like a glass of water please	6	I need to buy laundry washing powder
7	Will you be paying with card or cash?	7	Where is the coffee and tea aisle?
8	What are the specials for today?	8	The strawberries on display look delicious

Hear now. And always

As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a life full of hearing. We have provided more than 700,000 implantable devices, helping people of all ages to hear and connect with life's opportunities.

We aim to give people the best lifelong hearing experience and access to innovative future technologies. We have the industry's best clinical, research and support networks.

That's why more people choose Cochlear than any other hearing implant company.

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■ Cochlear Ltd (ABN 96 002 618 073) 1 University Avenue, Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia Tel: +61 2 9428 6555 Fax: +61 2 9428 6352

www.cochlear.com

Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always follow the directions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear Technology.

Cochlear™ Nucleus® implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderately severe to profound hearing loss. Baha implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderate to profound hearing loss

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