

## One Patient's Account of His Cochlear Implant Experience.

Hello All,

I had my first post-activation visit yesterday with the cochlear implant audiologist and I wanted to share the results.

The comprehension test involves sitting in front of a speaker in a sound proof booth. Various tones, words and sentences are played for the purpose of being identified by the listener. I have been taking these tests for over twenty years and failing these same tests at snowballing rate. At the risk of sounding morose, it was an exercise in futility that served only to plot my downward slide into the world of silence. Okay, that was risk-free morose...but accurate :) Eventually, it got to the point where I had to scoot my chair up and try to screw my ear into the speaker the best I could just on the off chance I might catch enough words to piece together a sentence that makes sense.

The pre-implant test score in July was a dismal 28%...with my hearing aides in! Yesterday, I sat in that very same chair, in front of that very same speaker. I instinctively leaned forward and tilted in my "best ear" the way I have always done. Something amazing happened. I realized I wasn't piecing together bits of auditory information in vain attempt to seem like I could hear. Sentences *came to me*. Effortlessly. And in complete form. I actually had forgotten what that was like. For the first time ever, during a hearing comprehension test, I subconsciously did a very simple, yet profound thing: I leaned back in the chair. I felt like a teenager in a batting cage on a Friday night, knocking the balls out to 390 ft every time. I could do no wrong. My post-implant hearing comprehension score? A whopping 90%!! And come to find out, most of the sentences don't make any sense at all. "What color is your black dog?" "Does Bobby walk to school or carry his lunch?" They're intentionally designed to thwart the wilier of the hearing impaired world such as myself. And here I thought I was fooling *them* :)

Amazing progress for week one? Yes, even for implant patients, this is considered remarkable, but there is still work to be done. My brain is still in overdrive working on identifying sounds. Voices still have a "munchkin" like quality. Don't despair, that's considered an upgrade from "chipmunk". I need to work on hearing long vowels and become more proficient using the phone. While the implant technology is truly marvelous, I just want to point out that the wind beneath those amazing technological wings is the human brain's ability to interpret and adapt in the pursuit of finding what it remembers as "normal".

Numbers can be impersonal, so, in closing, let me tell you what 90% sounds like: My wheelbarrow tire squeaks, incessantly – apparently it always has. My pig squeals happily whenever she sees me coming to feed her. I never knew she felt that way about me. My dogs' toenails click when they walk across the floor. I haven't heard that sound in 20 years! And forever the grand finale for me personally; if nothing else ever happened from this point forward, what has made it all worthwhile: Last night, without my wife serving as their interpreter, my three year old and five year old daughters sat on my lap and told me about their day. Yeah, I still have ways to go with rehab, but after a conversation like that with my girls, any gains or improvement from here on out is just "syrup on the pancakes".

Don't forget to take time to stop and listen to the roses!