



Music

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TO THE EARS

Patients with hearing loss who turn to **Main Line Audiology** stand to gain many benefits, ranging from more social engagement, improved communication and better cognitive function.

J.T. Prescott wasn't hearing what he'd hoped to hear, neither literally nor figuratively.

Four years ago, the then-61-year-old Chestnut Hill author's ability to hear was in a state of steady decline. Was it the result of years of having listened to and played loud music? Was it genetics, as both his parents experienced hearing problems late in life? Was it simply a product of getting older? Or was his hearing loss the result of something else, a source he hadn't even considered?

Whatever the cause, the condition began to affect him in ways he found unsettling. He became less engaged with family and friends, and he stopped attending movies, concerts and stage plays with his wife because he couldn't hear. In fact, his hearing became so poor that passengers in his car had to re-

mind him to turn off the turn signal; he simply couldn't hear it.

A visit to an audiologist affiliated with a local healthcare system proved as frustrating as it was fruitless. Prescott says the doctor basically handed a book of possibilities for his hearing loss and told him that maybe a hearing aid could be useful. The experience left him feeling as if a car salesman had pointed to a few vehicles on the lot and said something along the lines of, "Let me know when you've picked one out."

Prescott felt, in a word, exasperated. He resolved with continue accepting his impaired hearing. He felt he needed a miracle. Then he found one in Kathy Landau Goodman, Au.D., founder of Main Line Audiology.

“She’s the best,” Prescott says. “She’s very skilled, very knowledgeable. She genuinely cared about helping me. It didn’t surprise me that she was so understanding; I read on her website the essay she wrote about her father, who had hearing problems. She knew how hearing loss impacted someone’s life. I knew from reading that story about her father that here was someone I could tell in advance you can trust to guide you properly. She knew what I needed.”

After performing a comprehensive hearing evaluation and a needs assessment test on Prescott, Dr. Goodman told him what he had hoped to hear for many years: His hearing loss could be corrected. And it was, with a Lyric hearing aid, a virtually undetectable, nonsurgical, extended-wear device that rests inside the ear canal and uses the ears’ anatomy to funnel sound to the eardrum. The device is worn 24 hours a day, and is removed every few months and replaced with a new one.

“When Dr. Goodman put Lyric hearing aids in, I thought: *My God, I can hear!*” Prescott said. “The sounds I had lost touch with were deafening. I could even hear my own voice more clearly. Before seeing Dr. Goodman, I was slowly closing off everyone and everything around me because I just couldn’t hear. She changed my life.”

‘Rewiring in the Brain’

A pioneer in the audiology field, Dr. Goodman has spent the past 34 years changing the lives of those with hearing problems. And when she receives that same look of satisfaction and gratitude from patients that she received from Prescott?

“The feeling that you can do something to help improve someone’s quality of life is amazing,” she says.

In addition to having founded Main Line Audiology, Dr. Goodman co-founded the Pennsylvania Academy of Audiology, and served two terms on the Academy of Doctors of Audiology board of directors. The practice has been



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providing audiology services to the School District of Philadelphia for nearly 30 years. Since 1994, she has served as chair of the Audiology Awareness Campaign.

One important aspect of hearing loss that Dr. Goodman notes is not generally understood is the connection between hearing loss and the brain.

“We hear with our brain, not our ears,” she says. “Untreated hearing loss will affect not only the ability to hear sound accurately, but also higher cognitive function. Studies have shown that people over the age of 65 with hearing loss have a higher incidence of developing dementia. Depression has been linked to hearing loss.”

Studies conducted by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore have found links between

hearing loss, cognitive decline and dementia, suggesting a greater health threat than imagined. In one study involving nearly 2,000 men and women, ages 75 to 84, over the course of six years, the cognitive abilities, including memory and concentration, of those with hearing loss declined 30 to 40 percent faster than in people with normal hearing. Another finding: Corrective measures such as appropriately fitted hearing aids could have a huge influence on healthy brain function.

“When hearing aids are used, there is rewiring in the brain,” Dr. Goodman says. “Some research has shown that wearing hearing aids can potentially help prolong the onset of dementia for those prone to it. The sound stimulation to the brain can help restore and reorganize the connections in the temporal lobe.”

Seeking Help

Though estimates on hearing loss vary, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders estimates that nearly 25 percent of those age 65 through 74, along with 50 percent of those 75 and older, have disabling hearing loss.

“Yet people don’t get their hearing checked regularly,” Dr. Goodman says. “People go to the dentist twice a year to get their teeth checked, and get their eyes checked once a year. But when you ask someone when was the last time they had their hearing checked, some say not since the fourth grade. Your hearing should be checked once a year starting at age 55.

“Better hearing enables you to connect better with family and friends,” she continues. “It’s the one sense that affects other people. When you lose your sense of vision, it affects you and how you see the world. But when you lose your hearing, it affects communication.”

As Prescott learned to his utter delight, Dr. Goodman and her team of caring doctors at Main Line Audiology are experts in the area of diagnosing and addressing hearing issues. They also excel in the programming of Bluetooth hearing devices and the Lyric, having fitted more than 42,000 patients with these devices over the past 34 years.

Hearing loss is usually gradual. In many cases, the afflicted person is typically the last to notice. Only when one begins to experience severe difficulty do they seek the help of a professional.

“If you have a hearing problem, don’t wait to get it checked,” Prescott says, speaking from experience. “And as far as I’m concerned, there’s only one doctor you need to see.” ■



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