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“Have You Got Your Ears In?!”

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All people with hearing loss have experienced the two most painful words in the hearing loss dictionary—*never mind.* The hurt at hearing them never gets old, even though we may learn how to respond to them better.

But another question stings every hearing aid or cochlear implant user: *“Have you got your ears (or, things) in?”* This can spark a bad-hearing moment faster than you can say *dead battery.*

As hearing care professionals, you recognize this as the frustration felt by family and friends who don’t yet understand what hearing aids can do. Clearly there must be some technical problem—perhaps our hearing aid or CI batteries have died? Or maybe we *deliberately* aren’t using our *things* to cause irritation or tune someone out?

People with pristine hearing can be forgiven for believing that, with our CI or hearing aid, we should now be able to hear. I mean, technology *fixes* stuff, right? They don’t realize that the devices are called *aids* for a reason; they are *assistive*, not *corrective*, devices. As a result, we may hear better but not always *understand* better.

Except for showering and sleeping, I always wear my devices – I feel lopsided, and my tinnitus roars even louder if I don’t – but I know many users pull them off after work for some quiet time or delay using them in the morning for the same reason. But for most of us, these hearing devices are a crucial part of our dress code, as important as clean underwear, comfortable shoes, and protective clothing. Even *more* important because we need themto function.

However, being asked if I have my ‘things’ it still has the power to embarrass and irritate me. I try to control my aggravation and explain why I’m struggling to understand now. There’s clearly a problem that needs to be defined and remedied.

The person may need to hear about or be reminded of what hearing devices can and cannot do. But some adjustments may be required in the listening situation. Is there background noise? Is there a clear view of the speaker’s face? Is the person with hearing loss focused on the conversation? Often, simple adjustments can make major improvements.

Getting a hearing aid at 21 was life-changing, but I quickly learned what the device could and could – and that hearing people could not have the same perspective that comes only with personal experience.

Through the years, my father occasionally asked, when I said *pardon* more than twice in a conversation, *“Do you have your thing in?”* Of course, it hurt my feelings every single time, and I

would snap back, *"Of course I do!"* That probably irritated *him*. But when my 87-year-old dad finally got hearing aids for better communication with his lady friend during daily cribbage games, he went through the same learning curve, discovering that they didn't cure *his* hearing loss either.

At one time, the Hearing Husband might have asked the 6-word question at the wrong time, but now he asks only in the early mornings when I'm just up or before/after a shower. And he simply points to his ears and raises his eyebrows, and I either shake my head or answer with a voice. Good communication comes from years of living together—and learning the hard way.

Learning how to express their hearing loss needs and creating better listening situations should be part of your clients' aural rehabilitation program. It's a recurring issue on the hearing loss journey. Understanding the impact of hearing loss on communication partners is another important component of learning to live better with hearing loss.

My friend Myrtle was at the shore with her six-year-old niece. She showed the child how to skip rocks, and after a few minutes, the girl asked, *"Aunt Myrtle, have you got your thing in?"*

"I do, m'love, why?"

"The stones hitting the water sound so pretty, I wanted to make sure you can hear them."